

Surviving the Apocalypse:
A Verse-by-Verse Explanation of the Book of Revelation
by Paul Kocourek
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This study of the book of Revelation is born of a lifetime of studying this most fascinating of all books, a book of prophecy which tells of future events looming before us living here in the 21st century. It is this author's conviction that the time of their fulfillment is not far away. Because of this conviction, I want to share with all people the incredible future revealed by God in this sacred book, a future in which each individual's eternal destiny is at stake.

My theme verse for doing this study is this:

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Revelation 22:17).

Even as God offers the "Water of Life" without cost, so I want to offer this study without cost. I retain the copyright, but anyone who wishes may have a copy free-of-charge, and is also perfectly welcome, even encouraged, to send a copy to whomever he or she may wish, as long as it is also free-of-charge.

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Unless specifically identified as King James Version (KJV), as are a few passages, all quotes are from the NASB (The New American Standard Bible).

May God be exalted, praised and honored in and through this work, a labor of love. And may you, reader, one day also take the water of life without cost.

Paul Kocourek

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all passages quoted from the New American Standard Bible.

Version 1.1 1-09-2013 Correction of some misspellings

Version 1.2 4-13-2013 Bold type and additional text added to enhance readability and clarity

Chapter One

The book of Revelation is God's final Scripture to mankind. It covers the time of the days of the apostles up to our day and even the future beyond us to the very end of time and beginning of eternity.

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.” (Rev 1:1-2)

God gave to Jesus this revelation, and Jesus sent an angel to give it to John. Most translations (including the New American Standard that I am using here) say “communicated” it, but the King James Version says it best, for instead of “communicated”, it says the revelation was “signified.” To signify means to show by means of signs and symbols, and that is exactly what occurs in the book of Revelation. There are signs and symbols throughout it.

Keep in mind, though, that a sign or symbol, though figurative (i.e. symbolic), has a literal (i.e. actual) meaning behind it. When driving in the United States, every driver will see a sign posted on the side of the road, usually at intersections. It is mounted roughly as high as a man; has 8 sides; is painted red; and has 4 letters on it: S-T-O-P. While the familiar STOP sign is only a symbol, it has a literal meaning behind it. The driver of a motor vehicle is to use brakes to bring the vehicle to a complete stop.

The signs and symbols used in Revelation have literal meanings behind them. Fortunately, we are not left in the dark as to what they mean. The interpretation is either within Revelation itself, or can be found elsewhere in the Bible where the same symbols are used there. Hence, to understand Revelation, you must use the rest of the Bible.

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near,” (Rev 1:3)

There are seven blessings in Revelation, and this verse is the first of them. The letter was meant to be read in a church, and people were to hear it. More importantly, they were to heed it. James wrote:

“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:21-25)

Just as James teaches us that “an effectual doer...will be blessed in what he does,” so Revelation gives a blessing on “he who reads...and those who hear...and heed.”

“John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood--and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (Rev 1:4-6)

John greets the seven churches, of which more will be said in Rev chapters 2 & 3, with the familiar Christian 'grace and peace' greeting found in nearly all the epistles (see Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 3; Heb 13:25; 1 Pet 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 3; 3 John 15; Jude 2). I was taught that the greeting is a combination of Greek and Hebrew cultures. The Greeks greeted each other with grace, while the Hebrews greeted then (and still do today) each other with 'shalom', which means 'peace'. The Church is a blend of Jew and Gentile, and the greeting reflects this.

After John's greeting, he says from whom comes that greeting, none other than each member of the Trinity: “Him who is and who was and who is to come” is God the Father; “the seven Spirits” is the God the Holy Spirit; and “Jesus Christ” is God the Son. John tells us things about Jesus.

He is the “faithful witness.” During His time on earth, Jesus faithfully did the task God had given Him, and had been a witness to who God is:

“I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work You have given Me to do.” (John 17:4)

“I manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world...” (John 17:6a)

Jesus is the firstborn of the dead. This speaks of His resurrection, of which He is the first to be resurrected, and that we who believe will also follow.

Paul wrote of the resurrection:

“But each in his own order: Christ, the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming.” (1 Cor 15:23)

Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth. One day, Jesus will rule the nations:

“Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.” (1 Cor 15:24)

“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD. He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.’” (Ps 2:7-8)

John gives praise to Jesus, telling how He loves us and gave His blood to pay for our sins. Notice when it says “released us from our sins,” the verb tense is past tense. Jesus has 'released'

us. It is an accomplished fact; it is not something that will hopefully happen some day in the future, but is over with and finished. We are made 'priests.' A priest takes the things of people and gives them to God; a prophet takes the things of God and gives them to people. So it is that we as Christians, when we pray, we are acting as priests as we take our concerns and those of our fellow man and bring them before God in prayer. Peter wrote: "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

"Behold He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen." (Rev 1:7)

Daniel prophesied of Jesus in His Second Coming, saying:

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him." (Dan 7:13)

When Jesus was before the Sanhedrin in His trial, they put Him under oath to answer their question of Who He was, and Jesus answered from that prophecy in Daniel:

"But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure you by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless, I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" (Matt 26:63-64)

Now, in Revelation, that ancient prophecy in Daniel is repeated again. Every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him. This speaks of the entire human race, particularly the sons of Israel, whom Zechariah prophesied would pierce Jesus:

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of Grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." (Zech 12:10)

The piercing happened at the crucifixion, when nails drove through His hands and feet, and a spear pierced His side.

"I am the Alpha and Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (Rev 1:8)

Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and their use represent the eternal nature of God. He was there before anything was created, and will always be there, even beyond the end of the world. Almighty means that He is all-powerful. Someone has said that almighty means that God can do everything there is that can be done, all simultaneously, and it is not even an effort for Him.

“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” (Rev 1:9)

At the point of writing Revelation, all the other apostles had died as martyred. John was the last apostle. Instead of executing him, the Roman Empire exiled him to a prison island called Patmos. It might be they did this because each time they executed a Christian leader, it only made the 'sect' of the Christians to grow all the more. Perhaps they thought that executing John would give it the biggest growth of all, and figured 'out-of-sight, out-of-mind' might cause this irritating thing called Christianity to die out. Whatever their thinking, John says it was directly because of 'the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.'

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, 'Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.'” (Rev 1:10-11)

For John, perhaps it was just 'another day' serving the Lord. It was a Sunday, the 'Lord's day.' Have you ever heard a trumpet blow? If so, you know how loud it is. If as a prank, someone sneaked up behind you and blew a trumpet, you would likely just about jump out of your skin. Imagine poor John, startled, his heart stopping for beat or two as suddenly from behind him, a voice speaks, a voice so loud that it has the power of a trumpet blowing an announcement.

“Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned, I saw seven golden lampstands; and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girdled across His chest with a golden sash. His head and hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire. His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” (Rev 1:12-16)

The elements of the vision of Jesus have meanings. The seven golden lampstands (vs. 12) we are told in vs. 20 are the seven churches. The robe and golden sash (vs. 13) speaks of His authority. His head and hair being white like white wool, like snow (vs. 14a) speak of his wisdom of ancient ages. In the prophecy about Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, we also hear of his His ancient age.

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler of Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity” (Micah 5:2)

His eyes were like a flame of fire (vs. 14b) speak about His eyes being able to burn through things that would conceal, piercing all barriers. We are told in Hebrews:

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Heb 4:13)

His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace (vs. 15a), reminds us of the bronze of the altar of the burnt offerings and the sacrifices of the Law. The bronze altar burned up offerings placed on it; the glow of Jesus' feet tells of purity like metal so hot that all impurities are burned away from the metal. Such metal is pure and unblemished, spotless. Jesus is pure and spotless, and His sacrifice of Himself on the cross was the perfect sacrifice, meaning there is an end now of offerings on bronze altars.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Rom 10:4)

His voice was like the sound of many waters (vs. 15b) is almost deceptive. We think, ok, lots of water. I have had the experience of visiting the world-famous Niagara Falls. In a tour, they made the group put on hooded raincoats, and took us down stairs besides the falls. The water falling beside us in its vast quantity was a continuous rumbling roar. It was so loud that our tour guide had to shout to be heard over the roar! With this in mind, when it says Jesus' voice was like “the sound of many waters,” it is saying Jesus' voice is a vast, powerful sound, a sound as loud as a trumpet blowing right behind you. It is a voice of power!

In His right hand He held seven stars (vs. 16a), which we are told, are the seven angels of the seven churches (vs. 20). More on that later. Out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword. We find in Hebrews:

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)

In Ephesians, Paul teaches us about spiritual warfare, saying, “And take up the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (Eph 6:17)

Jesus doesn't merely give us the Word of God. He IS the Word of God.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a)

Scripture also says of Jesus:

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (Col 1:16)

Jesus, the Word, created all things. How did he do it? By speaking it into existence.

“Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)

Near the conclusion of Revelation, Jesus, Who is the Word and spoke all things into existence, fights with the nations assembled against Israel at the battle of Armageddon. That same power He exercised to speak the universe into existence is now turned against His enemies.

“From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations...” (Rev 19:15a)

Finally, in the vision, we find “His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” On a hot summer day when the sun is directly overhead, have you ever accidentally looked at the sun? You yank your eyes away from it, and have spots before your eyes. The sun's power actually comes to us from about ninety-two million miles away, and even at such a great distance, it blinds us. Yet, here is Jesus, the One Who created that sun, and uncountable billions upon billions more out in the vastness of the universe, the One Who merely spoke to create and put that incomprehensible numbers of stars into existence. This is the Jesus Who appears to John.

What is John's reaction upon seeing Jesus in His power and glory?

“When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, 'Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.’” (Rev 1:17-18)

Is it any wonder that John “fell at His feet like a dead man?” Would not you and I do so also? I know I would. Yet, Jesus is gentle with John, and places a reassuring hand on him, saying, “Do not be afraid.” Jesus then tells John truths about Himself. “I am the first and the last.” As we said earlier when the terms Alpha and Omega were discussed (vs. 8), these words speak of His eternal nature. He was there before the universe began, and will be there for all eternity. He also says He is “the living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.” This no ghost, but Jesus truly alive from the dead. He has resurrected, and now lives eternally. When He says “I have the keys of death and Hades,” He is indicating that He has the final word on who lives and who dies. This is a comfort for us, who lived in fear of the devil. Hebrews talks of how Jesus shared our flesh and blood nature in order to defeat death:

“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” (Heb 2:14-15)

Jesus is master over even death itself, and one day He will defeat death when He resurrects us who believe in Him:

“But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?’” (1 Cor 15:54-55)

“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” (Rev 1:19)

This verse is the key verse of Revelation, for it enables us to know how Revelation is divided, time-wise, in the purposes of God. There are three parts to Revelation:

“The things which you have seen” This is John's vision of Jesus in chapter 1.

“The things which are.” This represents the present age, the Church Age, as explored through the seven letters to the seven churches, as found in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

“The things which will take place after these things.” This is the future that follows the Church Age after the PreTribulation Rapture has removed the Church from the Earth.

“As for the mystery of the seven stars, which you see in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” (Rev 1:20)

At the beginning of this study, we found that the signs and symbols of Revelation are interpreted either by Revelation itself, or by the other places in Scripture where those symbols get used. This passage is of the former, where Revelation interprets itself. The seven churches are seven actual churches in John's day. A major trade route through Asia Minor would come upon all seven cities, in the order specified. The seven stars are angels of those churches. Scholars have debated whether these are literally angels, though. The Greek is *aggelos* (pronounced ang'-el-os), which means messenger. The mighty angels of God are, of course, God's messengers, and the usual interpretation of this Greek word. However, it is also valid to interpret this as a human messenger. Since Jesus was directing John to send the letter to those specified seven cities along the ancient trade route, John would have sent the prophecy of Revelation by a human messenger (or more than one messenger) so that a copy of Revelation would arrive at each city's assembly of believers. Another interpretation scholars debate is whether the word simply is meant for the head elders of the churches. Given that Jesus had some strong criticism for some of the churches, the ordinary use of 'angel' is unlikely as the correct meaning for the 'angels' of the seven churches, as it is unlikely the holy angels who stayed faithful to God, not joining Satan in his rebellion against God, would be the fitting recipients of rebuke, as some of those seven churches received. More likely then, it was the human leadership that is meant by the Greek *aggelos* in this context, and human leadership (i.e. elders and deacons) would then be fitting to receive either encouragement or rebuke. However it works out, Jesus was communicating by signs and symbols important spiritual truth for the congregations at those seven cities. We will see more on this as we look at chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter Two

In Revelation chapter 1, Jesus gave John instructions, "saying, Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea" (Rev 1:11). In chapter 2, we find the beginning of what Jesus wants to communicate to these seven churches, and by extension, what Jesus wants to say today to our churches across the world. As said earlier, the seven Churches in Revelation were in cities that lay along a trade route in Asia Minor. As you traveled along that route, you would come to each of those cities in the order they occur in Revelation. There were a few other cities with church congregations along that route, such as Colossae and Hierapolis, so that fact that these specific seven were picked by Jesus holds great significance.

Those churches then, while actual congregations existing around 2000 years ago, are spiritual types or patterns for the spiritual condition of any given church down through the centuries anywhere in the world. That is to say, a house church in the Roman Empire might be a Philadelphia type church, or a European cathedral church in the Medieval Ages could be a Thyatira-type church, insofar as their spiritual condition matches that described for Philadelphia or Thyatira. Accordingly, a little Baptist church in a small town in America could be an Ephesus-type church, a persecuted church in China could be a Smyrna-type church, or a church in an African nation might be a Pergamum-type church, and so on.

As we saw in Rev 1:14, Jesus' eyes are like a flame of fire, burning away the coverings over our churches, seeing through to the heart of what's really true. The spiritual condition of any given church is really the condition of the people in it. It behooves us as individuals to discern how Jesus' words to the seven churches may apply to us, personally. I say "may" because the seven churches span across a range of spiritual values, from good to bad, and from praise to shame, and not every condition Jesus describes, whether good or bad, will apply to everyone equally.

Another fascinating teaching that many Bible prophecy scholars hold, is that the spiritual condition of each of the seven churches is also descriptive of the overall spiritual condition of the Body of Christ as it progresses through the centuries. In other words, what Jesus said to Ephesus could be descriptive of the Church Age after the last of the Apostles (i.e. John) was dead. By this teaching, the Church as a whole across the earth passed successively through each of the seven churches as a phase, bringing us today to Laodicea as the last stage. If this view is correct, then the Church today as a whole is in a sorry state, as we shall see when we look at the letter to Laodicea.

As each message to the respective churches unfolds, we see a pattern. First, Jesus greets them, using descriptions of Himself that are particularly pertinent to their spiritual condition. Second,

He commends anything that is praiseworthy about them. Third, He rebukes anything about them that is displeasing to Him. Fourth, He recommends a course of action. Fifth, He gives a promise for those who overcome, where that promise is appropriate to that church and its spiritual condition.

Before looking at the church messages, let's look at that expression used by Jesus, "he that overcomes", and ask what He means by it. To find the answer, we compare Scripture with Scripture. In addition to Revelation, John also penned the Gospel of John, and three letters, 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. In his first letter (1 John), John wrote:

"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?...The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:4-5, 10-13)

When Jesus speaks to each of the seven Churches, He is speaking to those congregations as a whole. For example, this is like the Lord writing to the people of the First & Last Little Baptist Church, or the Sacred Congregational National Church, or the Assembled People of God Church of the Trinity (fictional names for illustration purposes.) Whatever the name of a congregation, individuals within real church bodies today need to hear the words of the prophecy of the book of Revelation and heed the things which are written in it, "for the time is near" (Rev 1:3). If in a letter Jesus gives some praise, let us not assume that it automatically applies to us--it may not. Likewise, if Jesus gives a stinging rebuke, let us not fall into the other extreme and assume it doesn't apply to us--it may!

Read and heed!

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:" (Rev 2:1).

Jesus starts His message to the church in Ephesus. As we saw earlier, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, meaning the church leadership such as elders and deacons, and the seven golden lampstands, meaning the congregations of the seven churches. These two qualities of Jesus, His holding and His walking, show He is personally present and involved with them at Ephesus.

"I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance, and have endured for My names sake, and have not grown weary" (Rev 2:2-3).

Jesus commends the leadership and congregation at Ephesus on several points. As the believers strive for moral purity, they do not tolerate evil men. They test men appointing themselves with lofty-sounding titles, but uncover that they are false. This is especially important to our day, for our Lord Jesus warned in the days before His return that "many false prophets would arise and mislead many" (Matt 24:11). The Ephesians didn't accept such men, but exposed them, and we would do well in our day to do the same, as there are today many who call themselves prophets or apostles, but are not. The Ephesians received praise from their Lord, for in such they were doing well. Jesus also commends them because they kept going when times got rough. They persevered for His name, and didn't grow tired of it all.

The Apostle James also taught about this:

"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance...Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord had promised to those who love Him." (James 1:2, 12).

The Apostle Paul also wrote:

"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal 6:9).

"But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good" (2 Thes 2:13).

The Ephesians were commended. Yet, there was a problem.

"But I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev 2:4).

Jesus is always to be our first love, the One whom we love before all else. The Ephesians were so busy doing things for Jesus, that they had little time for Jesus. They had moved away from the One who was WHY they did those things. The deeds the Ephesians did had become cold and mechanical, and had become more important than the One for whom they did them.

"Therefore, remember from where you have fallen and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place--unless you repent" (Rev 2:5).

Jesus calls upon them to repent, or change their minds. To explain "the deeds you did at first," we can look to the glorious days of human courtship, and how as love dawned and grew, the lovers couldn't see enough of each other, and looked for the least excuse to spend time and do things together. These are the "deeds" Jesus called upon the Ephesians to do again. Jesus' love for them had never changed, but theirs for Him had grown cold and stale, a formality only. Jesus warned them that if they don't repent, he would remove their lampstand. Tragically, this apparently happened. Ephesus, once a great city, is now a desolate ruin. Now, it is important to know that this removing of the lampstand is not meaning a loss of salvation for individuals. It is rather an indictment of the church as a local body meeting together. Even today, local churches "die" out. By this we know that their lampstands, too, were removed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8).

"Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which also I hate" (Rev 2:6).

Jesus hates the Nicolaitans, but what exactly are they? The word "Nicolaitan" means in Greek "victorious over the people," or "rulers over the people." The Nicolaitans apparently created a clergy-laity system whereby the clergy held supreme authority over the laity (i.e. the congregation).

Jesus taught us:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:25b-28).

Peter also wrote to this point:

"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness, nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Both Jesus and Peter show us that elders are to serve the flock of God and not to lord it over them. The Nicolaitans were disobeying this by lording it over those under them in defiance of Jesus' instruction. Jesus, the One who truly had the right to lord it over His disciples, chose to humble Himself and wash their feet as an example of how to serve and love one another. The Nicolaitans wanted to be the ones having their feet washed, not the ones washing other's feet. This is no less than the sin of pride. No wonder Jesus hates their deeds!

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God" (Rev 2:7).

The message, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," is given to each of the seven churches. This phraseology becomes significant later in Revelation 13:9, where it says, "If any man has an ear, let him hear"; it is no accident that the verse in chapter 13 does not add the extra words, "what the Spirit says to the churches." The reason for this and its significance is that the expression, "what the Spirit says to the churches" occurs while addressing the churches in the midst of the Church Age. Once the Pretribulation Rapture occurs, it is no longer appropriate to use that phrase. The verse in Rev 13:9 occurs, time-wise, during the Tribulation's seven years after the Rapture has occurred, and hence the Church is no longer present on the Earth. So, "what the Spirit says to the churches" does not apply anymore at that future point in time.

Now, Jesus says, "To him who overcomes". As we saw earlier in 1 John, John wrote that the one who overcomes is the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5). This means, to the one who has trusted in Jesus with saving faith. I use the expression "saving faith" because

some people think that faith just means a mental assent or agreement, like agreeing that Julius Caesar ruled the Roman empire, or that Abraham Lincoln was a president of the United States; for such people, faith is just a informational fact to note and move on. True saving faith is when a person sees their hopeless sinful condition (i.e. that we are sinners, face God's judgment and eternity in hell, and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves from this terrible doom) and turns to Jesus Christ by faith and says, "Lord, save me! I believe You died on the cross to pay for my sins, and that through Your death, burial and resurrection, I have forgiveness for my sins." Saving faith places ALL hope of rescue on Jesus Christ, meaning, if I make it to Heaven, it will be because Jesus saves me, not because I did or can do anything to save myself. True faith is true trust in Jesus.

Finally, Jesus promises to the one who overcomes, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God."

In Genesis, we are introduced to the garden of Eden, and two trees, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life (Gen 2:9). Adam and Eve were free to eat from any tree in the garden, including the Tree of Life, but were forbidden to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Had they eaten from the Tree of Life, they would have lived forever (Gen 3:22). However, they fell for the devil's lies, and plunged the entire human race into the slavery to sin, from which Jesus came to save and rescue us. Now, here in Revelation, we finally see a promise of the restoration of access to the Tree of Life once more. I don't know about you, but I can't wait to sample the fruit from that Tree, for it must be the most delicious fruit ever created! Moreover, anyone who places their trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, will also have access to that incredible tree one day.

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, Who was dead, and has come to life, says this:” (Rev 2:8)

Smyrna is representative of persecuted churches. To the leadership and congregation of Smyrna, Jesus describes Himself in His eternal nature, 'the first and the last.' He was there before all time:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word.” (John 1:1)

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2)

In the above prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is the truth that Jesus' “goings forth” are from long ago, from the “days of eternity.” Jesus is indeed the first. Moreover, He is the last.

“Of old you founded the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” (Psalm 102:25-27)

When time itself is finished at the end of all things and eternity begins, Jesus is there too, eternal and forever!

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Yet there is another meaning embedded for the suffering church persecuted church at Smyrna in the expression “the last.” Since Jesus, the Word of God, is eternal, He always has “the last word” on who lives and who dies. No matter what man may do or say, Jesus has the final word and overrules man.

The next way Jesus identifies Himself to the people of the church at Smyrna is that He “was dead, and has come to life.” By this He tells of His own ultimate suffering and death. He knows what it is to be falsely accused, to be hated by enemies, persecuted, and even wrongfully killed. Nevertheless, He has the greatest news to tell: He rose from the dead, conquering Death itself.

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” (Rev 2:9)

The church in Smyrna was in tribulation, meaning trouble (not the 7-year time called the Tribulation period.) For their faith in Jesus Christ they were being persecuted, and were suffering. Jesus speaks to their “poverty”, as measured by the possessions and things of this world. Even today in many places in the world, to let it be known you are a Christian can mean being marginalized, such that you are denied opportunities, get the poorer-paying jobs, or are denied a job at all. There's no doubt this is what the Christians of Smyrna faced, and Jesus addresses it. Yet, He says “but you are rich.” The Lord knows what true riches are, and in these He accounts Christians as wealthy! So it is also, that anyone today who suffers persecution for the sake of the name and faith of Jesus Christ, and does not deny Him, is accounted rich in God's eyes. Such believers are storing up for themselves riches beyond imagination in heaven.

Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:19-21)

Jesus also notes the “blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not.” By the time of the writing of Revelation, it had already been several decades since the time Jesus walked the earth among us. The Jews were described as committing blasphemy. This means they were denying that Jesus is the Christ (i.e. the Messiah), even as do most Jews today in this our time in the Church Age before the Rapture. Also, He says they say they “are Jews and are not.”

Paul the Apostle spoke of this:

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.” (Romans 2:28-29)

Paul's argument is that a true Jew is one who has faith in Jesus as the Christ (meaning the Messiah) and doesn't base it on outward physical attributes and actions, such as observing the Law (Rom 2:23-24); being a genetic descendant of Abraham (Luke 3:8); or having been physically circumcised (Rom 2:25). The antagonistic scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day had the above, but Jesus said they were like "white-washed tombs," meaning they looked nice on the outside, but were defiled in the inside the way a grave has a dead man's bones inside. God looks not at outward appearances, but at the heart.

When God was directing the prophet Samuel to anoint a king to replace Saul, the prophet saw a man Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him" (1 Sam 16:6b). God's response to Samuel's inward thought was unexpected:

"But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

So, when Jesus says of those in Smyrna that say they "are Jews and are not," He is indicating those physical blood descendants of Abraham do not have the faith of their father Abraham, a saving faith in God and ultimately a saving faith in Jesus. Indeed, concerning Abraham's faith in Himself, Jesus said to the Jews of His day:

"You father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56)

The Jews persecuting the Christians at the church at Smyrna were unbelievers, and in their unbelief they opposed Jesus. The Apostle Paul experienced this persecution:

"And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" (Acts 18:4-6)

Jesus said these unbelieving Jews were a "synagogue of Satan," for they were doing the deeds of Satan by denying Jesus! They thought they were serving God, but in fact were serving the devil!

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev 2:10)

Jesus acknowledged that the church in Smyrna was yet to suffer more. Some of them were going to go to prison for their faith in Jesus. He explained that it would be for them a time of testing; the statement that it would be for "ten days" shows, however, that it would be limited. Even though the tribulations coming against the believers at Smyrna were of Satan, God allows only a certain amount. This is seen clearly in the book of Job, where Satan had to get permission from God to attack His servant Job. God allowed Satan to do Job harm, but put limits on what he could do (see Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6). Just as God allowed it as a test of faith, so God allows trials to test our faith. Moreover, just as God rewarded Job for his faithfulness by restoring to Job double what he had lost, so God will grant us a reward for our faithfulness under trial. We may well

suffer the death of loved ones, loss of possessions, imprisonment on false charges, or any number of things that hurt or wound us deeply; so, along with the church at Smyrna, Jesus promises to us also the crown of life for our faithfulness under fire. About this James also wrote:

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.” (Rev 2:11)

As we saw in 1 John 5:4-5, all those who place trust in Jesus Christ for salvation have overcome. Jesus says overcomers will not be hurt by the second death. What does “the second death” mean? As with other passages in Revelation, this is explained by Revelation itself. The second death is the eternal fire of damnation.

“This is the second death, the lake of fire.” (Rev 20:14b)

Jesus promises that no believer will go to the lake of fire. Once saved, always saved. Jesus said:

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish.” (John 1:27-28a)

Jesus promised that His sheep would NEVER perish! There is NO Lake of Fire awaiting a saved man, woman or child! Moreover, a saved person cannot lose their salvation, for if you could lose your salvation, then Jesus lied about His promise that His sheep “will never perish.” Anyone who tells you that you can lose your salvation is dead wrong!

This promise that the second death will not hurt the one who overcomes gives us all encouragement today. When God saves us, He saves us thoroughly -- and forever!

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:” (Rev 2:12)

As Jesus speaks to the leadership and congregation in Pergamum, He identifies Himself in a foreboding and ominous way, saying He is “the One who has the sharp two-edged sword.” In the Bible, a sword is a symbol of warfare, bloodshed and death. Its main purpose is to cut and kill people. In those days, some cultures put a sharp edge on only one side of a sword, meaning to attack, you have to hack at your target, and then draw back your arm in order to swing the same edge again. The Romans, however, equipped their soldiers with two-edged swords, so that a soldier could cut both to the left and to the right. It was a particularly deadly weapon, giving an advantage to a Roman over his one-edged sword opponents on the field of battle. As we saw earlier in this study, Jesus is the living Word of God, almighty in power, who caused the creation to spring into existence merely by speaking it. Later in Revelation, Jesus turns this power against all the assembled armies of the world at Armageddon:

“And the rest [i.e. the armies] were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him...” (Rev 19:21a)

Now, Jesus uses this symbol of killing with regard to the spiritual condition of the church at Pergamum. Why would He do that? What could be so wrong? We'll look at that in a moment, but first, let's look at how Jesus commends them.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is, and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.” (Rev 2:13)

In this passage, we are given an incredible insight. The Devil, who is Satan, has a throne set upon Earth from whence he rules the kingdom of darkness consisting of all demonic powers in his campaign against God. The Apostle Paul wrote:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12)

Just as in the armed forces of today's armies in which there are ranks like, private, captain, major, general, etc, there exist ranks in the demonic forces operating under Satan in their battle against God and heaven: rulers, powers, world forces of darkness, and spiritual forces of wickedness. An example of how they operate is found in Daniel as an angel of God tells Daniel how he was sent right away in answer to Daniel's prayers, but someone called “the prince of Persia” withstood him for twenty-one days (Dan 10:13a). No mere human being could withstand an angel of God, and no good angel would. Thus, the “prince of Persia” is a demon of apparently great rank in charge over the nation of Persia (now called Iran.) That it could withstand him for three weeks shows the wicked power and might of that demon “prince.” The angel only got through to Daniel because God sent His mighty archangel Michael, one of the “chief princes,” to help fight (Dan 10:13b.) The angel told Daniel furthermore that he would have to leave shortly to go fight against that demon prince of Persia alongside Michael, because another demon prince, the “prince of Greece,” was about to come and join the fight! (Dan 10:20-21).

What awesome things transpire outside the range of our physical sight, and yet no less real than anything in our physical world. The wonder of our salvation is that while no human is a match for the least angel or demon, yet we who believe have the presence of God the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and have through Jesus overcome them.

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

Speaking of spirits, John warns us to test them. While the majority of humans will never meet one in the more direct sense that Daniel experienced, we do meet them regularly in the mouths of false prophets and false teachers.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit

that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3).

The church in Pergamum dwelt in the very city where the mastermind of all evil, Satan, set up his throne to direct all the evil spirits in all his evil plans. Jesus commends the church of Pergamum for holding fast His name, and not denying faith in Him, even when Antipas was martyred. We know of Antipas only that for which Jesus praises Him. Yet, believers, one day we will each meet Antipas, the man who faithfully clung to Jesus Christ even at the price of his life, and indeed all who laid down their lives for Jesus, even the martyrs of all the centuries up to this present day. A statistic I heard said more people have given their lives for Jesus Christ in the past century, than in all the other years since the apostles' day combined. The church at Pergamum remained faithful even in the face of Satan himself. However, as we move on in the message, Jesus now speaks in reproof.

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.” (Rev 2:14-15)

Balak, an enemy of Israel, offered money to Balaam, a prophet of God, to curse Israel. Balaam instead blessed Israel, infuriating Balak (Numbers 22:1-24:25.) However, Balaam, wanting that money, sold out God and Israel by teaching Balak a strategy. While Balaam could not curse Israel for God, if Balak could induce the Israelites to sin, God would curse the Israelites Himself because of that sin. The evil end Balak sought could be achieved. Balak would get the curse he wanted, and Balaam would get the money he wanted. So, Balak enticed the children of Israel into sexual immorality and unfaithfulness to God by their intermarrying the immoral Midianite women and worshipping their gods (Numbers 25:1-18). Later, God ordered Israel to take vengeance on the Midianites (Numbers 31:1-3). Balaam was also killed in that campaign (Numbers 31:8). Intermarriage to unbelievers of the lands surrounding Israel was strictly forbidden by God (Deut 7:1-6), because those unbelievers would have their own gods they worshipped, and would draw the Israelites into serving them as well. In point of fact, that is exactly what happened.

Christians, this is a warning to us as well today! Do not marry an unbeliever, nor even date one. Melody Green, wife to the late Christian music artist Keith Green, wrote a pamphlet called “Why A Believer Should Not Date or Marry An Unbeliever.” In it, she wrote: “Any Christian foolish enough to date an unbeliever is foolish enough to marry one.” We are under orders in Scripture:

“Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness; or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.” (2 Cor 6:14-16a)

Someone has said, if a son of God marries a daughter of the devil, he can expect trouble from his father-in-law. In Pergamum, this order was being violated, and it displeased Jesus greatly. On

top of that sin, the evil clergy-laity system of the leadership having power and lording it over the congregation was finding adherents in the church, a thing which Jesus says He hates!

“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.” (Rev 2:16)

Jesus is not mincing words. He means business as He threatens to destroy those in Pergamum who have compromised with the world by doing the sins of Balaam and Balak and the deeds of the Nicolaitans with “the sword of His mouth.”

May we today realize that sin is serious business. It is never safe to sin. God takes it seriously enough to have sent Jesus to the cross to die for our sins. If any of us is involved with sexual immorality (and that includes pornography), we need to repent, and by God's enabling grace, turn from it. Combat further temptations the “grace” way. This means, when faced with that oh-so-appealing temptation, say, “I am dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus.” (Rom 6:11; Col 3:1-5)

“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.” (Rev 2:17)

The “hidden manna” calls to mind the food that God provided to feed the children of Israel for forty years in the wilderness (Ex 16:13-35). The original manna, perfectly nutritious for human health containing the proper proportion of protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins and minerals, was available on the ground for the children of Israel such that any Israelite could take some from anywhere. The manna Jesus offers is “hidden,” meaning it is not for the whole community for just anyone to take, but is personalized, just for you. Our Redeemer loves and knows us each as individuals. Moreover, just as manna was bread for the Israelite's physical life, Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life (John 6:48-51) for our eternal life.

Jesus also promised a white stone. In those parts, when someone was called into court on accusations, stones were used to cast a vote of guilt or innocence: a black stone was a vote of “guilty”, but the white stone represented “not guilty.” He who believes in Jesus will never be condemned!

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 8:1)

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” (Rom 8:33-34)

Finally, Jesus says He will give us “a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.” My brother had a special name of fondness for his daughter; he called her “pumpkin.” Laugh if you will, but many parents have a special name for their child, a 'pet' name if you will, that in fondness, delight and love sets that child apart for them from all other persons

in the world. I believe this new name Jesus will give us is a special name of love between God and His redeemed ones, and that special name of fondness, delight and love is between each person and God alone. The fact that it is written on the white stone, which is the vote of “Not guilty!” is reinforcing God's redemptive love. Jesus has paid the price for our sins; we overcome by faith in Jesus; and He then finally gives us each a special name that confirms His loving redemptive purpose. Can anyone really believe He'd give you a special loving name, and then let you lose your salvation and send you to hell? No way!

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:” (Rev 2:18)

Jesus identifies Himself to the leadership and congregation of Thyatira by “eyes of fire” and “feet like burnished bronze.” Both references speak of heat and intensity. His eyes like a flame of fire speak to burning through veils that obscure the truth. He is omniscient and He sees all. His feet being like metal caused to be heated in a furnace until it glows speaks of purity, for such metal at such intensity of heat would have all impurities burned away. When giving this as a quality about Himself, Jesus is warning of judgment in that His purity is needed for something impure going on. When Moses stood before God at the burning bush, he was told to take off his shoes, for the place he was standing was holy ground. In Biblical times, the feet always needed to be washed, as they got the dirtiest. That Jesus' feet are glowing with heat and power demonstrates no impurity exists with Him, whereas our feet are dirty with sin.

“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.” (Rev 2:19)

Jesus commends the church at Thyatira for their Christian walk. They did deeds pleasing to Jesus, and excelled in love and faith. They had humble hearts of service. The fact that Jesus tells of their perseverance shows they were encountering persecution and tribulation, and were enduring these, not denying Jesus. He also notes that their later deeds were “greater than at first,” so they were growing and flourishing as Christians. However, not all was well at Thyatira.

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.” (Rev 2:20-21)

The woman named Jezebel holds a place in infamy. In Israel's past, a wicked king named Ahab took her to wife.

“It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshipped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria.” (1 Kings 16:31-32)

Ahab's marriage to this pagan woman brought about idol worship in Israel. Elijah the prophet of God called for a showdown between the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jezebel's

false god Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40). It ended with the true God, the God of Israel, demonstrating His power, and Baal demonstrating nothing. Elijah executed the false prophets of the false god Baal. Jezebel heard of it, and instead of repenting by turning from the false Baal to the Lord Who proved Himself by fire to be the true God, she vowed to kill Elijah.

“Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, 'So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.'” (1 Kings 19:1-2)

The Lord protected Elijah and she was unable to fulfill her threat. Yet she continued in her vile ways. The Lord ultimately judged her with a most ignominious and dishonorable death.

“Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.'...Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him.” (1 Kings 21:23, 25)

Later that prophecy about her came exactly true -- she was killed and her body was eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:30-37).

In Thyatira, there is another woman named Jezebel. Whether this was her actual name or not, the infamy of that name was certainly true of her spiritually. Like the first Jezebel, this one was leading God's people into two sins, sexual immorality and idolatry. Jesus said she called herself a prophetess. Years earlier during His time among us, Jesus warned concerning the days before His return:

“Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.” (Matt 24:11)

Also, Peter warned of the same:

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (2 Peter 2:1-3)

Concerning the first of the two sins, sexual immorality, Peter warned about false prophets and false teachers that “many will follow their sensuality”; like the false prophets of old, Jezebel of Thyatira also brought in immorality. We need to take notice that sexual immorality is set apart from all other sins in Scripture.

“Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.” (1 Cor 6:18)

Each believer is inseparably joined to Jesus. Just as you go where your feet carry you, so too we can also say that where we go, we carry Jesus with us; in other words, because we who are believers are joined to Jesus, where we go, He goes. This fact perhaps provides an explanation

why immorality is so personally offensive to Jesus Christ. It is as though we are putting Jesus Himself in bed committing sexual immorality!

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” (1 Cor 6:15-17).

Ancient pagan religions often used immoral sex with temple prostitutes as an incentive to bring people in to follow their gods--this certainly was true of the temple of Diana in Corinth.

Now, concerning the second of the two sins that false prophets and teachers bring in, idolatry, we might think that a Christian would not follow an idol like a statue of Baal in today's world, but there is nevertheless an idolatry that Christians do fall into: the love of money.

“But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Tim 6:9-10)

Paul also tells us:

“...and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (Col 3:5b).

Notice that Paul does not condemn having money. It is not how much money we have, but rather our attitude toward it. A person in deep poverty can buy lottery tickets or seek some other way to get rich quick, and be guilty of the love of money, whereas a rich person could have the proper attitude toward money and not be guilty of loving it. I will repeat myself: it is not how much money we have, but our attitude toward it that determines whether we are guilty of the love of money.

Putting it all together, it is not surprising that Thyatira's Jezebel was leading Christians into the twin sins of immorality and idolatry. Sex and money are two powerful temptations, and used together, they hit hard!

“Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.” (Rev 2:22-23)

Jesus' threat of sickness and the death of her children remind us of David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba. God called David to account, exposing his sin, and David repented. (2 Sam 12:1-13). Nevertheless, God struck the child conceived in this sin with sickness, and on the seventh day the child died. (2 Sam 12:14-23). Now Jesus threatens the same to Jezebel's children. She herself would be struck with a bed of sickness, which implies a lingering sickness that so weakens her that laying in bed is all she could do. Those committing adultery with her were promised exceeding great troubles. The Apostle Paul ran into a situation with a man in the church in

Corinth committing adultery (1 Cor 5:1-5), and pronounced judgment on him. It is never safe to sin. I recently heard someone say, "There is no right way to do wrong."

In addition to physical immorality, it may also be that a spiritual adultery is involved in the situation in Thyatira. James speaks to this:

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4).

We as Christians need to read and heed the words of the prophecy of this book called Revelation. If we do not commit literal physical adultery, we can still quite easily commit spiritual adultery by desiring the world more than Jesus! From Ephesus we learn: let us not leave our first love, Jesus. From Smyrna we learn: be faithful to Jesus through tribulation. From Pergamum we learn: love Jesus more than money (don't be a compromiser like Balaam!). Now from Thyatira we learn: stay true to the teachings of Jesus (don't follow false prophets and teachers.)

"But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them--I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless, what you have, hold fast until I come." (Rev 2:25).

There are movements today in Christianity where there are men and women being called prophets and prophetesses, and even apostles. But...are they? Did not our Lord Jesus warn, "many false prophets will arise and mislead many" (Matt 24:11)?

Did not the Apostle Peter warn, "just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies" (2 Peter 1:1b)?

One such heresy is an expression that has been passed around quite a lot: "slain in the Spirit." Christians, this expression occurs nowhere in Scripture, and has no Biblical equivalent, nor is the idea taught in the Bible. Peter's warning was that the false teachers "will secretly introduce destructive heresies." If the teachers teaching "slain in the spirit" were to have said, "I bring you a new heresy," nobody credible would have followed them. But, using feigned words of spiritual authority, they have deceived many trusting believers into thinking this is spiritual truth, where it is NOT!

A whole culture of Christian thought, theology and practice has arisen around that heresy and others associated with it by those who practice it. Some of its proponents have huge empires of staggering wealth. Yet concerning these false teachers, Peter warned also, "in their greed they will exploit you with false words." (2 Peter 2:3a). The King James Version says they will "make merchandise of you." In other words, they will get rich off your money.

The words "slain in the Spirit", and many other terms and sayings like them, are the kinds of deceptive and false words about which Peter was warning us. Is anyone today listening to the warnings of Jesus and Peter? Jesus said of the false prophets that they "will mislead", not one or

two, or a handful, but “many.” There is only one cure for false teaching: go back to the truth of Scripture and cling to God's Word, not Man's word! Read and heed!

Jesus said to those in Thyatira who had not embraced Jezebel's false prophet teachings (what was called the deep things of Satan), “hold fast until I come.” Find the truth and sell it not! Paul warned of the rise of false teachers in our days:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths.” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

The phrase “slain in the Spirit” is one such myth, and the ministries that have sprung up around it are the result of funding contributed by many people “wanting to have their ears tickled.” If you, reader, are involved in any such ministry, be warned! Jesus sees through the deception with eyes like a flame of fire, and stands in judgment on false teachings with feet like burnished bronze made to glow like metal in a furnace. Repent, or be judged!

“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.” (Rev 2:26-28)

Believers in Jesus will receive authority over the nations to rule at Jesus' side after the 7 years of the Tribulation period are over. Jesus also promises the “morning star.” What can He mean by that? Again, Revelation itself interprets this.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” (Rev 22:16).

In speaking of Bible prophecy and the promised coming of Jesus, Peter wrote:

“So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19)

In the passage describing the Rapture, Paul writes:

“...and so we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thes 4:17b).

So we see that Jesus promises to His believers His very own self! The redemptive purpose of God is for us to spend eternity with Him in a personal loving relationship. Jesus said in His prayer to God the Father:

“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” (John 17:3).

“He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 2:29)

Let us read and heed!

Chapter Three

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:” (Rev 3:1a).

When Jesus identifies Himself to the leadership and congregation of Sardis, He reveals He has the seven Spirits of God. Every Christian knows that God is one God revealed in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, how can there be “seven Spirits?”

The number seven in the Bible represents completion or perfection. We have already seen there are seven blessings in Revelation where a passage starts: “Blessed are...” We also know there are seven churches, seven stars, and seven golden lampstands. As we shall see in this study of Revelation, there are also other sevens in the prophecy, such as seven Seals, seven Trumpets, seven Bowls, seven Thunders, and more. So, what does the Lord mean by “seven Spirits?” As said before, the symbols in Revelation are either interpreted by Revelation itself, or by how they are used somewhere else in the Scriptures. To interpret how the one Holy Spirit can be seven Spirits, we need only look to a prophecy concerning the coming of Jesus in Isaiah 11. It turns out that the seven Spirits are seven aspects of the one Holy Spirit. Watch as we count them:

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD [1] will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom [2] and understanding [3], the spirit of counsel [4] and strength [5], the spirit of knowledge [6] and the fear of the LORD [7].” (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Since Jesus has the seven Spirits, these aspects in Isaiah 11 are His as well. Jesus has the Spirit of God, wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He is one with the Holy Spirit. There is no problem too difficult for Him to solve, no secret kept from Him, no lack of ability to guide us on the right course to take. He is almighty in power, all-knowing, and in perfect harmony with, and in submission to, God the Father. This is the Jesus speaking to the church at Sardis!

Jesus also reveals to Sardis that He holds the seven stars, which we have already seen are the “angels”, or leadership, of the seven churches. The leadership is to guide and shepherd the flock of God, but they in turn answer to the chief Shepherd Jesus Christ. Peter wrote:

“Therefore I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; not yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

When people use the expressions “in the hands of,” we usually mean “in the power or control of someone.” For instance, a governor might say to a prisoner, “It's in my hands to keep you locked up or to free you”; or we might say a kidnap victim is in the hands of a terrorist. When Jesus says He holds the seven stars in His right hand (Rev 1:2b), it's wise to understand that He has the

power and control over the leadership of the churches, and He can exalt them, or He can lay them low. Our lives and times are truly in His hands, for Jesus is Lord.

“I know your deeds that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (Rev 3:1b).

Jesus knows the truth about this church. To the outside world they have a reputation of being alive. Yet, Jesus who has the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of knowledge, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord, paints a sad picture otherwise: “but you are dead.” Let's explore this further as we go to the next verses.

“Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.” (Rev 3:2-4)

The church in Sardis left off living for God. They didn't feed on His Word, and were polluted with sin in their faithless lives. They were asleep in their faith and walk, and their Christian lives are fading. Jesus says they are dead, and yet calls on them to wake up. The Christian term for death is “sleep” (or “asleep”). The Apostle Paul wrote using this term as he wrote about the resurrection from the dead:

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep...we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who are asleep.” (1 Thes 4:13a, 15b).

When Jairus, an official of the synagogue, came to Jesus to beseech Him to heal his twelve years old daughter, for she was about to die, Jesus went with him to go heal her. However, while the distraught father went desperately to seek help from Jesus, the daughter died, and mourners wept and wailed.

“Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but He said, 'Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep.'” (Luke 8:52). The people laughed Him to scorn--they knew death when they saw it. But, they did not know that death is no barrier to Jesus, who Himself would die and rise again back to life. He raised the girl to life again (Luke 8:54-55). To Jesus, the girl was but asleep, to be wakened when He so chose.

As Jesus speaks to those He loves in Sardis, He calls upon them to wake up! It's not too late. The church in Sardis had lost much, but Jesus counsels them to wake up and strengthen the things that remain. Often opportunities come our way, and if we do not act on them in time, they are gone forever. Jesus calls of them to “strengthen what remains.” We can't undo lost time and lost opportunities, but we can act to seize what opportunities there still are remaining to us. Otherwise, like the situation in Sardis, even that which remains, “which were about to die,” will be lost forever to us also.

In contrast to the church at Thyatira, about whom Jesus says their later deeds are greater than their first deeds, the deeds in Sardis are not completed in the sight of God. When praying to the father, Jesus said, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4). Those in Sardis had NOT completed the work God gave them to do. Quite possibly they became a club of insiders, and were no longer reaching out with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to those outside the church. Souls were dying, lost forever, while those in Sardis sat on their hands, having the message of eternal life, but not sharing it with those who desperately needed to hear it. This was for them, and is for us of this day, a great sin polluting them like dirt soiling a garment. We are to keep our personal garments clean, even as we dirty our hands to reach out to those whose garments are polluted by their sins, even Jude counseled us:

"And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." (Jude 22-23). We ourselves are not to have our garments polluted by the flesh.

Only a remnant in the church in Sardis were doing God's work. With them, Jesus was pleased. They were not afraid "to get their hands dirty," as the saying goes, in doing God's work. To them Jesus promised they will walk with Him in white, signifying purity and glory to come. Why does He make this promise? Because they are worthy!

"He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before the angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev 3:5-6).

Those who believe in Jesus will be clothed in white garments of glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, this glory was demonstrated:

"And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." (Matt 17:2).

Moreover, those who believe in Jesus are promised, "I will not erase his name from the book of life."

The Book of Life. Its pages contain the roll call of all who will inherit eternal life. (see Ex 32:32-33; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; and 22:19). In addition to the Book of Life, there are also in Revelation the Tree of Life (Rev 2:7); the Crown of Life (Rev 2:10); and the Water of Life (Rev 22:17).

God is the source of life, which is why rejecting Him is death, for to reject God is to reject life itself. Look as this truth is revealed in Scripture:

"The wages of sin is death..."

"...but the free gift of God is eternal life." (Rom 6:23)

Someone has said that sin is not harmful because it is forbidden; rather, sin is forbidden because it is harmful.

Regarding the Book of Life, it appears that all names are originally written in it. But, as men sin and die without placing their faith in Jesus, their name gets blotted out upon their death. What a sad time that must be in heaven! They COULD have had eternal life, but for whatever reason, they rejected the free gift and paid the price of their unbelief. Jesus asked the poignant question:

“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

Jesus also promised to those who overcome that “I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.” In contrast to this, Jesus had spoken of those who disbelieve:

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38).

Jesus is NEVER ashamed of believers in Him, whom He gives the right to become children of God:

“He came to His own [Israel], and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” (John 1:11-12).

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one father, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” (Heb 2:10-11)

Reader, are you a believer in Jesus? If not, what is holding you back?

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no man can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” (Rev 3:7-8)

To the leadership and congregation at Philadelphia, Jesus identifies Himself as holy and true. Like the other messages to the churches, these aspects of Jesus pertain to the spiritual condition of this church (and by extension, to all churches like Philadelphia as a type.) This identification reflected on the believers there because they were living lives that were holy and true to Jesus. This praise, coming from the One who is absolutely holy and absolutely true, is high praise indeed.

He reveals He has the key of David, whom God called a man after his own heart (1 Sam 13:14). The use of this identification is that Jesus gives a blessing to the Philadelphians, for they are men

after His own heart too. He is well pleased with them. Jesus' use of "Key of David" also comes from His being a descendant of King David, heir to the throne of David, the One promised to him to sit on his throne forever. The symbol of the key means He has authority to do as He pleases with them. In our day, when we say of someone that he 'has the keys to the city,' we mean that person has free access to a city, that he is authorized to go where he wishes and do as he likes, that he is trusted and valued. The use of the key symbol in regard to the believers at Philadelphia shows Jesus intends to give them a free rein to do His works and will, as He reveals when he says of Himself, "who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens." The Lordship and authority of Jesus is also revealed as He chooses to open for them a door that no one can shut.

The Apostle Paul spoke of doors opened to him (1 Cor 16:8-9; 2 Cor 2:12), and also asked for prayer for another door to be opened (Col 4:2-4). In our day, it is also perfectly appropriate for churches to pray that God will open a door of opportunity. We just need to make sure that we are willing and ready to go through it when He opens that door.

Jesus told the church at Philadelphia that they have "a little power." The Philadelphians had kept Jesus' word, and did not deny His name. There is spiritual power in faithfulness to God, whereas sin saps us of vitality and strength. Let us examine ourselves and do as Revelation 1:3 teaches us: Read and heed.

"Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie--I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you." (Rev 3:9)

As we saw in the message to the church at Smyrna, there were Jews both there and in Philadelphia who professed belief in the God of their fathers, the God of Moses and the Law, but as far as Jesus was concerned, they belonged to, and were agents of, Satan, because they as Jews denied Jesus to be their Messiah (i.e. the Christ.) You cannot deny the Son of God without also denying God the Father Who sent Him. John had written to address this very point:

"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." (1 John 2:22-23).

"So that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." (John 5:23).

No matter how religious someone is in his belief in God, if he does not honor Jesus, he has no part in the Father either. To deny Jesus is to be an antichrist, which in Greek is "antichristos", and literally means "opposing, or opponent of, Christ." There is one man whom we shall see later in this study who is not merely 'an' antichrist, but is the one scholars call 'The Antichrist.' Nevertheless, anyone who opposes Jesus Christ is of an antichrist spirit (1 John 4:3).

In today's world, there are many cults and religious systems that exhibit this spirit of antichrist. The Jehovah's Witnesses are antichrist because they deny the deity of Jesus as God the Son.

“But of the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above your companions.’” (Hebrews 1:8-9) Jesus Himself says He is God. Consider the following from John's gospel.

5:16-18 working as God works

5:19-20 does what God does

5:21 gives life to the dead

5:22 absolute authority to judge

6:32-35 gives life to the world

6:38-40 came down from heaven

8:58 is the "I AM" that spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14)

Moreover, Jesus accepted worship (Matt 28:9,17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38), whereas worship is to be directed only to God (Rev 19:10; 22:9). For any lesser being to accept worship that is God's alone is sin; yet Jesus never sinned (Heb 4:15). Only God is our Savior (Hosea 13:4), yet Jesus is our Savior (Titus 3:4,6). These do not conflict because Jesus is God. Also, God will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8); yet Jesus shared that glory from all eternity (John 17:5).

The Trinity is truth; God is one God, yet three Persons are in that one God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). To deny this is to be antichrist. In Satan's desire to be God, we shall later see in Revelation the Devil imitating the Trinity by putting together what some scholars call the "unholy trinity".

The Mormons are antichrist, for they make artificial, meaningless distinctions that do not exist in Scripture, saying the intelligence that is Jesus was eternal, but that both His spirit and body are created. Jesus in His person and deity is an eternal spirit, uncreated, because He himself created every thing that is created.

“In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” (John 1:1-3)

Only Jesus' body was created:

“Therefore when He [Jesus] comes into the world, He says: 'Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me.’” (Hebrews 10:5)

The religion of Islam is antichrist, for it acknowledges Jesus as only a prophet, but denies He is the Christ (i.e. Messiah) and denies He is God the Son. The modern religion of Judaism is antichrist, a synagogue of Satan, for to this day it denies Jesus is the Messiah and God the Son. One day, the whole world will embrace the full embodiment of the antichrist spirit in the man Bible scholars call The Antichrist.

In the days of the church in Philadelphia, the Jews in their city were antichrist in spirit, for they denied Jesus. Jesus says He will make them come and bow down to the Christians, so that they will know Jesus loves His people, the Church.

“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” (Rev 3:10-11)

It is part and parcel of the Christian life and walk to face adversity and tribulation. Paul instructs us to be “...persevering in tribulation...” (Rom 12:11b). Perseverance is repeatedly called for in the Christian life.

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial, for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12)

To persevere is to keep going in your walk and to stay trusting with your faith. It is needed because troubles we encounter try to turn us away from God.

“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.” (Hebrews 10:32-36)

When we become Christians, we become to the spiritual realm of darkness persons who are hated because we belong to the Light, our Redeemer, Savior and Creator. We have, as the saying goes, “a target painted on our backs.” At the first, Satan and his forces will do all they can to keep us from trusting in Jesus Christ as our Savior. Failing that, they will attempt to neutralize our effectiveness for God by luring us with worldly pleasures and temptations to sin. Failing that, the forces of darkness will try to use those people still in spiritual darkness themselves, the lost, to harass, persecute, harm or even kill us.

As believers we have a need to endure, to “hang in there,” to persevere. Is it any wonder we are told that Paul and Barnabas were “...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying, ‘through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of heaven.’” (Acts 14:22)

Following their example, also looking to ourselves, we should strengthen the souls of fellow believers, encouraging them to continue in the faith. Scripture says, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim 3:12)

We should not be surprised if some of that spiritual resistance comes to us from members of our own families. Concerning our following Jesus, He said:

“I have come to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.” (Matt 10:35-36)

Maybe someone will have second thoughts and say, “Is it really worth it all? After all, this sounds like a lot of trouble.”

To answer that, let's look to Paul's teaching:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom 8:18).

The glory that is to be revealed. Think on that a moment. There is glory coming, so great that the worst we experience on earth will be utterly overshadowed and overmatched in splendor beyond earthly imagination. Yes, it will be worth it!

Jesus says to the believers at Philadelphia that, because they kept the word of “My perseverance,” He would keep them “from the hour of testing...about to come upon the whole world.” Almost two thousand years have passed since John penned these words, so we know that description “about to come upon the whole world” isn't talking about the immediate future of that day. In the same vein, the words 'hour of testing' don't mean literally one hour back in those days. However, it does mean a time of limited duration. Remember, the book of Revelation is 'signified' to us, meaning its truths are communicated via signs and symbols. Being eternal, God has a perspective on time that is different than ours. Peter wrote:

“But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” (2 Peter 3:8).

In the context of Revelation, the “hour of testing” is best understood by the events found described in Revelation chapters 6 through 19. This “hour of testing” is actually seven years long, and is often called the Great Tribulation, a term technically reserved only for the last half of the seven years (see Matt 24:21). However, so many people have used the term to describe the whole seven years, we will for convenience call the entire period the “Tribulation” period (i.e. “Trib” for short.)

Jesus promises the Philadelphia church that He will keep them from the Tribulation period. “He says, 'I am coming quickly.'” This doesn't mean that He would soon come in those days when the prophecy was given, but rather that when He came, it would be fast! How fast? When Jesus comes for His church in the Pre-Tribulation Rapture (more on this in our next chapter), He will resurrect first all dead believers, and then all living believers. Paul wrote:

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep [i.e. die], but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...” (1 Cor 15:51-52a).

The Greek word for “moment” is “atomos,” from which we get the words “atom” and “atomic.” In the understanding of the Greeks, an atom was the smallest thing possible, which could not be further subdivided. Therefore, when Paul writes “in a moment,” he is writing of an “atom” of time, a time period so short that it can't be measured. In computer-speak, a nanosecond is a billionth of a second, a short time indeed. This kind of measurement was beyond the understanding of ancient peoples. However, they understood something being faster than a “moment”, or a “twinkling of an eye.” The Rapture will be happen faster than the blink of an eye, faster than an instant of time!

Jesus is coming quickly!

“Hold fast what you have so no one takes your crown.” Bible teachers have identified five crowns a believer can win as a reward from the Lord. The Greek for these crowns is “stephanos”, which means a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games, or a symbol of honor. They are:

- 1) A Crown Imperishable, for those that follow Jesus through life's struggles (1 Cor 9:25)
- 2) A Crown of Exultation, for soul-winners (1 Thes 2:19)
- 3) A Crown of Righteousness, for those who love Jesus' appearing (2 Tim 4:8)
- 4) A Crown of Life, for those who persevere under trials, even unto death, for Jesus' name (Rev 2:10, James 1:12)
- 5) A Crown of Glory, for those who shepherd the flock of God faithfully (1 Pet 5:4).

It is possible that some of the above are really the same crown. For instance, the Crown Imperishable might be the same crown as the Crown of Life or the Crown of Righteousness, but just described differently. Also, the Crown of Exultation (a.k.a. Rejoicing), might not be an actual crown, but be simply figurative language for the joy of meeting people who made it to heaven because you shared the gospel of Christ with them. However many there are, these can be won, but also lost, for Jesus warns “...so no one takes your crown.” Nevertheless, imagine what a day of joy that will be when you kneel before Jesus Christ and the throne of God the Father in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and as all eyes in heaven watch, He places a inexpressibly beautiful crown on your head!

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which came down from heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 3:12-13)

Symbolic language is at work in this passage; yet it is not so mysterious to our understanding that we can't grasp it. Jesus says He will make overcomers “a pillar.” Well, what is a pillar? It's a column, a support post, in a structure that usually holds up a ceiling. Since it's obvious Jesus is not talking about transforming humans into columns of stone, then we need to dig a bit deeper.

Even in our day someone can be called “a pillar of the community.” This means they are outstanding in their value to the community, and an example to which others can look to see how things are properly done, a pattern after which others can model themselves. So, when Jesus speaks of overcomers being made into pillars, He is commending them as examples of how things are to be rightly done. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant!” is the praise they receive. That they will be pillars in the temple of God, and will not go out from it anymore, speaks to being in the very dwelling of God in His own personal presence. Paul writing about the Rapture says, “...and so we shall always be with the Lord [Jesus].” (1 Thes 4:17b).

God's name will be written on the overcomer shows that he is identified as being personally valuable to God. When a manufacturer today takes pride in the craftsmanship of what they make, they often proudly say something like, “Our name is on everything we make.” So it is, that God is proud both to be identified with His redeemed people and to label them as those He made. Moreover, overcomers will have written on them the name of God's city, the New Jerusalem. This guarantees a place in that dazzling city, of which more will be said in the last two chapters of Revelation.

However, we will sneak a peek at it anyway. The New Jerusalem is called “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” (Rev 21:9b). Overcomers are looked upon as the bride of Christ, His wife! How much does a groom love his bride? If the courtship and marriage are as they should be, his love for her eclipses all else. He would lay down his life for her, so deep and rich is his love for her. Jesus did that for His Church. The Apostle Paul wrote about human marriage:

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and have Himself up for her.” (Eph 5:25).

So it is, that believers are loved that much, and will dwell in the very presence of God as His Son's bride and wife. Even as in human marriage a woman takes a new name, the name of her husband, so Jesus promises we who believe will take on a new name as well, Jesus' name. However, even that name is itself a new name for Jesus, and we who believe get it, too!

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches!

“To the angel of the church at Laodicea write: the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:” (Rev 3:14)

Jesus identifies Himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true Witness.” He chooses these, for these are elements He desires in His people, and as we shall see, these very elements are lacking in the leadership and congregation of the church at Laodicea. The word “amen” means “let it be so.” Jesus has the final say on what is to be, and that things shall be in such-and-such manner. This is a rebuke to the Laodiceans, who are not what He desires them to be. Jesus says of Himself that He is the faithful and true Witness; the Laodiceans are not.

Finally, Jesus says He is the beginning. This actually means “source” or “origin”. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God....”

Jesus was there at the beginning, as Micah says, His goings forth are from “days of eternity.” (Micah 5:2). Not only is Jesus there at the beginning, but He is also the Creator, or source of all things:

“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.” (Col 1:16).

This, He is the Source of all Creation. As the Designer and Architect of the universe, of all things seen and unseen, He knows how things are meant to be. This One Who is the Source, unlike the other churches, has no words of praise for the Laodiceans, only reproof.

“I know your deeds that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.” (Rev 3:15-16).

When we want something to drink, we either want something nice and hot (like tea, coffee, hot cocoa, or such), or we want something refreshingly cold (like a glass of water or our favorite beverage.) What we do not want is a lukewarm drink (unless we are desperately thirsty.) Who among us who gets water from the tap and finds it lukewarm, doesn't spit it out and either run the water until it gets cold, or else adds some ice to chill it? Likewise, in the case of drinking coffee at a restaurant, when the drink cools off to become lukewarm, do we not ask a serving person to 'freshen' it by pouring more hot coffee for us?

Jesus likens this very basic human attribute to the spiritual lives of the Laodiceans. What is all the more appropriate to this is that Laodicea received its water supply from hot mineral springs. Because the source was some distance away, the water was brought to them via aqueducts. By the time the water arrived, it was lukewarm. Jesus took a physical phenomenon local to Laodicea, one that every person in that city knew well, and was applying it to their spiritual lives. We, too, need to examine ourselves to see if we, too, are lukewarm. Are we “cool” toward temptation and sin, or are we warming up to it, allowing it a foothold in our lives? Are we “hot”, or “on fire” toward God, or are we cooling off, content that we believe in Jesus, but are not getting excited about our faith anymore?

The story is told about a Bible teacher who had a paper flip chart in front of the class. He drew on it a line, and labeled one end “hot” and the other “cold.” He asked the class to rate themselves on this scale he'd drawn. The students felt they weren't “cold” towards God, but felt it would be hypocritical to rate themselves as “hot” toward Jesus. So, they rated themselves in the middle. The teacher then flipped the chart over and showed the next page. To their chagrin, the same line was also drawn there, but with the word “Laodicea” at the middle. Do we also have reason to feel the chagrin the class felt after that lesson? Jesus finds lukewarmness to be unsatisfying and undesirable.

Read and heed.

“Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.'” (Rev 3:17)

The town of Laodicea was fabulously wealthy. When an earthquake destroyed the town, the Roman Empire offered to come in and rebuild it for them. The Laodiceans politely declined and rebuilt the town out of their own personal money. The church at Laodicea was materially very wealthy. Materially, they truly had need of nothing. Jesus acknowledges their material wealth, but criticizes them, for though they were materially rich, in His eyes they were spiritually poor and penniless.

“You do not know....” The church there was not even aware they were spiritually destitute. They thought they “had it all,” but in things that matter to God, the Creator of all material things, they were “dirt poor,” and didn't even know it.

“You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked.” These terms describe spiritual poverty so complete, that they don't, spiritually speaking, have even clothes on their body. This also speaks to our day to our churches. Is our wealth in the goods and money we possess, or in our relationship to Christ Jesus? Keep in mind we don't need to actually have money or possessions to be 'Laodicean' if our heart's attitude toward money is wrong. Paul wrote:

“But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” (1 Tim 6:9-10).

We can be materially poor and yet have a “love of money” and be guilty of “longing for it.” In contrast, a man can be wealthy and NOT have a love for it. Wealth in itself is not evil, but those possessing it do have to make sure they use it in a way that pleases Christ:

“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” (1 Tim 6:17). The Laodiceans failed this test. Do we?

“I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” (Rev 3:18).

Jesus advises the church at Laodicea on spiritual things using physical things they understood. First, they were wealthy, having great amounts of gold. Jesus advises them to get true wealth:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt 6:19-21)

Judging from what Jesus said to those at Laodicea, their hearts were in their earthly treasures. The Apostle Paul also wrote to the wealthy:

“Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share.” (1 Tim 6:18)

In contrast, Jesus taught a parable about this:

“And He told them a parable, saying: 'The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” Then he said, “This is what I will do; I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and then I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

The image of buying from Jesus gold refined by fire is instructive as well. Gold ore from the ground is intermixed with dirt, soil and such. The story is told of a modern day visitor to the Middle East watching a goldsmith at work who took gold ore and put it in an iron pot over a fire. As the fire heated it, the gold would separate from the dirt (also known as dross. Because gold is so much heavier and denser than dross, the gold sank to the bottom and the dross rose to the surface. As the visitor watched, the goldsmith leaned over the pot and skimmed the dirt from the top, and waited for more separation. The visitor saw the goldsmith repeat this process several times. Curious, he asked him, “Sir, how do you know when the gold is pure enough?” The goldsmith answered, “When I can see my reflection in it.”

Jesus advises the Laodiceans, and us today, to buy gold refined in fire -- that is, gold that fire has purified. Our lives are gold ore, precious metal intermixed with dirt. As Jesus applies the fire of adversity, whether by persecution or tribulation, it has the effect of bringing to the surface the 'dirt' in our lives, all those ugly things we keep hidden deep inside. How do we “buy” such gold? By living godly lives.

“All who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”

As we live for Jesus, it brings on the fire to our gold. Our dross comes to the surface as troubles afflict us, and it is patiently and lovingly skimmed off by our Savior, purifying us. How does He know when our gold is pure enough? When He can see His reflection in us.

Jesus also advises them to buy white garments to clothe their nakedness. As we saw in the message to the church at Sardis, Jesus said, “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments.” What was the reason for it? “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.”

So, when Jesus advises the church at Laodicea to buy white garments, “so that you may clothe yourselves,” He is sternly but lovingly directing them to “walk with Him.” He also advises them to buy “eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.” The major reason Laodicea was so

materially wealthy was because they were famous for a medicinal eye salve they produced. Again, Jesus used a physical thing with which all Laodiceans were familiar and could see, and applied it to teach them a spiritual; thing they could not see. They needed to have the eyes of their understanding opened to the bitter spiritual truth about their condition.

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:19-20)

Jesus reaffirms the reason He is addressing the Laodiceans in this fashion with His letter to them: “Those whom I love...” There is a need for “tough love” with those whom we love when they are going down a road to ruin and destruction. Jesus says, “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline.” Laodicea differs from the other churches in that it receives no praise, but only reproof, and discipline. Yet, discipline is not unusual for Christians, as the writer to Hebrews tells us:

“You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He discipline, and He scourges every son He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” (Hebrews 12:4-11)

Some Bible teachers have said the Laodiceans were not saved people. I disagree. As the passage in Hebrews shows us, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him, for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.” Art these not the very words Jesus said to the Laodiceans in verse 19, proving they were saved sons of God? Lukewarm and erring sons, to be sure, but sons nonetheless. If we today find ourselves being disciplined, then we know that it is for our good. Discipline may take the form of sickness, or loss of a job, or relationship problems. If such things happen, we need to check ourselves to see whether God is trying to get our attention. I have heard the anecdote that sometimes God pulls the rug out from under our feet so that we land flat on our back, and there is nowhere else to look but up. However, troubles of the kind I just listed are not necessarily discipline, so it is best to pray and ask the Lord to reveal what His will is when troubles come.

Jesus calls on the Laodiceans -- and us today -- to be zealous and repent! Be filled with zeal for Jesus! Some of us may be so sluggish in our faith, we may genuinely feel at a loss as to how to recapture that zeal. The answer is to go to Jesus and ask Him for that Divine help. Pray and seek His aid, and He will surely grant it. The word “repent” means to change your mind, or your thinking. Our thoughts are like the steering wheel of a car. It sets the course for where our

actions will take us. When Jesus counseled the Laodiceans (and us) to repent, it meant a sober re-evaluation of their goals and values. They had to completely rethink their attitude toward their wealth; they needed to be rich in good deeds so as to be rich toward God. They (and we) need to stop being lukewarm, sitting on the fence in the middle. Take a stand for Jesus. Be hot in zeal toward His name. Be a cool refreshing drink to thirsty souls around us. Use the goods of this world to do good toward others, as John the Baptist told the crowds:

“The man who has two tunics, is to share with him that has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.” (Luke 3:11b).

To illustrate, let me tell a true story. I was with a friend on a hot summer day at a food festival in my home town, and we saw a man running back and forth to people about to enter the festival grounds. My friend suggested we witness to the man, who looked homeless. I tried to tell him about Jesus, but I could not keep the man's attention, for his eyes kept shifting from one person to the next. I realized the man was hungry, so I invited him to come with my friend and me and I would buy him a meal. So, we went back, bought food, and sat down on the grass under the shade of a tree. Then the man said, “Okay, now I am going to listen to you, because now I know you care about me, because you bought me some food.” We spoke, and toward the end of the conversation, the man prayed and put his faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

The Laodiceans, and we as well, need to open our eyes. There are people all around us who need Jesus. A simple act of kindness or generosity can open a heart and win a hearing for the gospel. I have heard it said that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.” The painful picture of this statement is that Jesus is standing outside the church, knocking for admittance. He is Lord, yet He is gentle. He doesn't kick the door down. His promise is that if we will but open the door, He'll come in and we'll have a grand time together. There will be dinner over which we can talk and fellowship and have an intimate sharing of good things. Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts today. He has every right to command us, yet He chooses gentleness in appealing. His every intention is love that is concerned for our good and welfare.

Reader, if as you read this, you feel the tug of Jesus, open your heart to Him. If you are not sure that you have ever trusted in Him for the forgiveness of your sins, or if you are not sure you are going to Heaven, then why not take this time to avail yourself of His offer today?

In a nutshell, we have all sinned, which is rebellion against God that deserves death. Judgment is sure and inevitable, inescapable by anything we can do. God chose to do for us Himself what we could not do for ourselves. He sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to be born as a man, grow up as a human, and live a life without any sin of His own. Then, when He went to the cross, He submitted Himself to God as a scapegoat for us. Though he had no sins of His own, He took responsibility for your sins and mine, as a substitute in our place. God's full justice and wrath against our sins fell totally on Jesus alone. Jesus bled on the cross, and died so that our blood would not have to be spilled unto death. God's righteous wrath against our wickedness is fully

satisfied, and so now He offers a full pardon and forgiveness of all our sins if we will look by faith to the cross and Jesus dying for us there.

If you would like to complete the transaction to receive forgiveness for your sins and a full pardon, you can pray the following prayer. There's no magic ritual or formula to the words. The exact words are not important--the trust of your heart is what matters. God is reading your heart even now, and knows.

“Lord, I confess I have sinned. My sins deserve death and your wrath. I believe Jesus Christ shed His blood and died for me, in my place as a substitute for me, and He paid for all my sins. As proof that payment was accepted by You, He then rose again from the dead after being buried for three days, and now lives forevermore. I now receive that payment He made for me as I receive Him as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for the forgiveness of my sins. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

If you prayed that, God heard you, and you are forgiven. You are now pardoned, and have a new spiritual life called eternal life, and are now what is called 'born again.' The Apostle John wrote:

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13).

Also, he wrote:

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes Jesus is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:4-5)

Amen!

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 3:21-22).

Every true believer in Jesus Christ not only will receive a crown, as we saw earlier, but will also sit on a throne along with Jesus. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Holy Spirit of God is saying to all of us who live today.

Chapter Four

Before the Throne of God Alone

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.'” (Rev 4:1)

With this introductory verse, so many things change. In Rev 1:10, Jesus divided the book of Revelation into 3 major parts:

- 1) “the things which you have seen.” (past tense)
- 2) “the things which are” (present tense)
- 3) “the things which will take place after these things.” (future tense)

As we saw earlier, Revelation Chapter One is “the things which you have seen.” Chapters Two and Three are “the things which are,” Now we shift forward to the future, OUR future, that follows the present Church Age. It should be noted that “church” is used 19 times in Revelation Chapters One through Three. Now, at Revelation 4:1, the word “church” disappears altogether, ceasing to be used. Someone has said that the church becomes conspicuous by its absence. The age of the Church on Earth is a time of gentle grace, but with the removal of Church from the Earth by the rapture, it has now become time for harsh judgment. For about two thousand years God has stretched forth His hands in kindness to the human race to come to Him through Jesus Christ. Christians have been God's ambassadors to the world, imploring people to be reconciled to Him.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

It has been noted that the last action a nation takes before declaring war is to recall its ambassadors. The time for kindly talk is over; the time has come for stern action. The fact that the Church Age is over is revealed in that third part of Revelation 1:19, “the things which will take place after these things.” When we open Revelation 4, the first thing we read are the words “after these things.” Then, so that there is no room for ambiguity, the voice of Jesus, the voice ringing with authority like a trumpet being blown, like the roar of many waters over a massive waterfall, also tells John, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” If the Church were still on Earth (i.e. the Rapture hadn't happened), then the Church Age would still be ongoing, and we would still be in the second category Jesus gave us: “the things which are” (i.e. present tense.) In order for something to be “the things which will take place after these things” (i.e. the future tense), there has to be an end of the ongoing things, such that what follows is after them. Hence, the Rapture does indeed happen thus ending the present Church Age, and it is time for the third category of future things, “the things which will take place after these things.”

The Rapture itself is revealed in His words, “Come up here.” In the vision John alone goes up to heaven. In reality, when that time comes, John gets to do it again, being raised from the dead along with all other believers in Christ who have “fallen asleep” (i.e. died), plus along with all believers still remaining alive.

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thes 4:15-17).

John sees a door opened in heaven, which calls to mind Jesus' words:

“Truly, truly, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” (John 10:7b-9)

“Immediately I was in the Spirit and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.” (Rev 4:2)

Jesus, the Door to heaven and eternal life, calls John up to heaven. At the Rapture, Jesus will then also be our Door to enter heaven when He comes for us and calls us, His ambassadors, Home to be with Him forever. Now, the Rapture happens “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor 15:52a). At this point of being called, John not only sees a door, but hears Jesus' voice as a trumpet. He then immediately, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” was there in heaven in the Spirit.

The very first thing he sees in heaven is the throne of God. I thought about this a while. If you were to visit a king or queen on earth, when you were brought into their presence, you wouldn't be looking first at the chair they sat on, however ornate. A royalty's presence overshadows all else. God is King of Kings, a vastly greater commanding presence, so why is John looking at His throne? Then it occurred to me that the imagery here suggests the throne is immense, the size of a mountain; when John looked straight across, he saw but the base of it. His gaze shifted up the throne to rest upon the One sitting on it. There he sees God on that throne! What would be our reaction if you or I saw that? I can only imagine!

“And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.” (Rev 4:3).

The Lord, who is God the Father, is likened in appearance to two gem stones, a jasper and a sardius. These two stones are the first and last stones used in the “breastpiece of judgment” first worn by Aaron, Moses' brother, in his role as the first high priest of the Law. Regarding this “breastpiece of judgment,” God told the Israelites:

“You shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby [Strong's Hebrew 124 odem = redness, i.e. the ruby, garnet, or some other red gem: - sardius], topaz and emerald; the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; these shall be set in gold filigree.” (Exodus 28:17-20).

Just as the stones were the first and the last on a breastpiece of judgment, so their appearance ascribed to God, who is also the First and the Last, is telling us that God is sitting there as a Judge bringing judgment. God's offer of free reconciliation has changed with the recall of His ambassadors. At this point in Revelation, God is now declaring war on a rebellious angel Lucifer, now named Satan, and the sinful human race that has followed him rather than God.

The scene John sees speaks of “a rainbow around the throne.” When God judged the people of earth in Noah's day, He promised to never again do so by a flood of water.

“I set My bow in the clouds, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember the covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:13-16)

God keeps His promises, for he is Faithful and True. Yet, He has promised judgment, only the next time it will be by fire. In our day, few people take God seriously or believe He would judge the world--indeed doubting that He destroyed it in the past. The Apostle Peter wrote to address these things:

“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all creation continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.' For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” (2 Peter 3:3-7)

Now, the emphasis of an emerald draws to mind again the twelve gem stones on the breastpiece of judgment. The 12 gems on the breastpiece represent one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Emerald is the third gem, and Levi is the third son of Israel. Only the Levites could wear the priesthood's breastpiece of judgment. By drawing to mind the emerald and hence the Levitical priesthood, this is signaling yet another change that will happen in our world after the Rapture removes all the Christians. As we shall see later, there will be rebuilt in Israel a temple in Jerusalem in which the Levitical sacrifices will again be offered. We will also see two very special Jewish agents of God who will do the miracles of Moses and Elijah, as well as see 144,000 Jewish men who will be ministers of God to the nations.

The book of Revelation, starting with Revelation 4:1, turns very Jewish in flavor and style, yet another proof the Church of Jesus Christ has been Raptured off the Earth. God's style of dealing with the world through His mostly Gentile Church with just a remnant of Jewish believers, now changes to all things Jewish to finish up promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (whom God renamed Israel), and indeed to all the children of Israel.

So it is, that by drawing our attention to the rainbow, and to the breastpiece of judgment, and the tribe of Levi, we see the beginning of God getting ready to smite the world with miracles and terrors not seen since the book of Exodus when He sent miraculous plagues to Egypt, telling Pharaoh, "Let My people go."

Judgment is coming!

"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments; and golden crowns on their heads." (Revelation 4:4).

Much discussion has been made as to who these elders are, a common view being that they represent the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, for after all, $12 + 12 = 24$. Others suggest they are angels. I completely disagree that they can be angels, and while the 12 tribes and 12 apostles is a possibility, I will offer my understanding based on comparing Scripture with Scripture that the twenty-four elders represent the entire Church after the Rapture. Let's look at the clues to see why.

First, they are sitting on thrones in the presence of God, the King of the universe. That the angels are not the elders is easily proved:

"But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13)

Here, the writer to the Hebrews asks the rhetorical question about which of the angels were ever given the invitation to sit at God's right hand? The answer is none of them, so the 24 elders cannot be angels. Indeed, the writer to Hebrews follows up on that point by letting us know that angels are not rulers, but servants:

"Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14).

Now, in monarchies of earth, when the king sits in official business, others of non-royal blood stand. A queen sits, as do the royal children, and a visiting royal person would also sit, but lesser ranks would stand, for standing is a symbol of a servant waiting on the king to serve him, whereas sitting is a symbol of reigning. If a monarch stood to greet a guest, it was a sign of great honor. This happened to the first Christian martyr, Stephen:

“But being filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" (Acts 7:55-56)

When the great oratorio Messiah by Handel was performed for Handel's king, and the choir started singing the Hallelujah Chorus, the king stood, understanding that even though he was the king, he was but a servant standing in the presence of the King of Kings, and it has ever since been a tradition during the performance of Messiah to stand while the Hallelujah Chorus is sung.

So, when John looks at the 24 elders sitting on thrones in the presence of the King, he is telling us the 24 elders are royalty. But, how can any human royalty have sufficient rank to be able to sit with God, the King of kings? Let's go back to two earlier passages in Revelation for our answer:

“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him will I give authority over the nations; and he shall rule over them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father.” (Rev 2:26-27)

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21).

These two passages are promises given to Church believers only, not Old Testament saints like the 12 tribes of Israel, and definitely not given to angels. Moreover, Peter wrote to Christians, saying:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you one were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

By the promises of Jesus Christ, Christians will rule the nations and be seated with Christ, sharers in His supreme royal authority. There is yet one other tantalizing hint of glory for the Church implied in their being seated. Even as a king sits, so may his queen sit as well. As we shall see later, the Church is the Bride of Christ, and as such, she shares in the royal husband's reign, even as an earthly queen reigns with her husband the king.

Next, the 24 elders are “clothed in white garments.” Again, we turn to a passage earlier in Revelation:

“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments.” (Rev 3:5a).

Once more we see that this description of the elders is a Church-only promise not given to angels nor Old Testament believers.

Finally, we see the elders with “golden crowns on their heads.” This reminds us of the five crowns Christians are promised in the New Testament: The Crown Incorruptible, The Crown of

Life, the Crown of Rejoicing, The Crown of Glory and the Crown of Righteousness. These crowns are promised to church-only believers, not Old Testament believers.

The number 24, though, is somewhat puzzling. It occurs nowhere in the Gospels or the Epistles, so why 24? First, it isn't 12, as that would strongly imply that the 12 apostles alone were seated on those thrones, and no other Christian could qualify. Yet, clearly Jesus promises ruler ship and thrones "to him who overcomes." Now, obviously it would have been distracting to have John see millions of thrones around the throne of God, one for each "who overcomes."

To solve this mystery, let's remember that Revelation chapter 4 and beyond has symbols with a strong Jewish style, flavor and nature. King David and two of the sons of Aaron solved a problem in his day regarding the service of the Levites in the temple by dividing the priesthood service in groups of 24, and this way each group got to take a turn to serve the Lord. (see 1 Chronicles 24:1-19)

Thus, some Bible teachers have suggested that the 24 elders is such a representation, the entire Church being represented in John's vision by a group of 24 elders so that everyone gets a turn to serve the Lord. Peter said to Christians, "You are a royal priesthood." The Church is shown seated as royalty in Rev 4:4, yet in the next chapter, they are shown acting as priests in Rev 5:8, in that they are holding "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints." When we as Christians pray, our prayers are remembered in heaven like a sweet and pleasing incense. When we pray for one another, lifting up one another's concerns and needs, we act as priests of God, lifting up prayers like incense to God. We are told Jesus is our High Priest:

"Where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedak." (Hebrews 6:20).

Since Jesus' priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedak, and since we who believe in Him are a 'royal priesthood' under Him, it would seem that the priesthood of Christians is not Levitical in nature, but rather also like the Melchizedak priesthood under Jesus as our High Priest.

"Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.'" (Rev 4:5-8)

What a mighty scene! Out from the throne there is lightning, sounds and thunder. This speaks of sheer, overwhelming power! Who among us has not in a storm seen the power of lightning? In electrical power use, most homes around the globe use electrical voltages in the 110 to 220 volts range, with industry usage being in the hundreds of volts or higher. Scientists tell us that

the voltage in a lightning bolt starts at about 1,000,000 (one million) volts, and can go as high as 100,000,000 (one hundred million) volts! The measure of electric current is the ampere (amp, for short.) Again, home total usage is typically measured at about 100 to 200 amperes. Lightning bolts start at about 1,000 amperes, and can go as high as 100,000 amperes!

Scientists have dreamed of capturing and harnessing the power of lightning, but as yet no materials on earth can achieve that lofty goal. When a lightning bolt travels, its temperature reaches 50,000 degrees of heat, five times hotter than the surface of the Sun. When lightning strokes through the atmosphere, it superheats the air to incredible pressure and the air expands instantly away from the lightning bolt's path, leaving behind a vacuum. This makes the initial explosive sound of a thunderclap. Then when the bolt ends, the air cools and rushes back in to fill the vacuum, which is the rumble of thunder we hear afterward. When lightning hits a tree, that tremendous energy travels through the tree's sap, instantly boiling it into a superhot gas with a pressure so great, it blows the tree apart. Is it any wonder that few people survive being hit by lightning?

This is the scene facing John as he sees God. Lightning bolt after lightning bolt flash, clap and thunder! Then there are also sounds. While some translations put "voices" here in the passage, I think the word "sounds" is more appropriate, for the scene is demonstrating God's sheer, awe-inspiring POWER! My thought is that these sounds are of the power of an earthquake as it shakes the ground with a rumble and roar. The Apostle John experiences lightning, thunder, and sounds. The ground trembles beneath his feet as he sees and feels power beyond imagination! This is the throne of God the Father Almighty, the very One who said, "Let there be light," and the universe sprang into existence from out of nothing!

Next, John sees seven lamps of fire, which are the seven Spirits of God. As we saw in Revelation Chapter One, this represents the seven-fold ministry of the one Holy Spirit (see Isaiah 11:2). Then John sees something like a sea of glass, like crystal. In John's day, glass was primitive, not clear as in our day. What John sees is perfect, as clear as crystal. This scene is similar to the mysterious vision of God's throne scene in Ezekiel 1:1-28. There, too, we see a great crystal expanse (Ezekiel 1:22).

John tells of four living creatures. These represent the best of God's creation. The first is the lion. Even in our day, we call the lion "the king of the beasts." Scriptures says of the lion:

"There are three things, which are stately in their march, even four which are stately when they walk: The lion which is mighty among beasts and does not retreat before any..." (Proverbs 30:29-30)

The second living creature is the calf, meaning a young strong ox, a great beast of burden. Scripture says of it:

"Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much revenue comes by the strength of the ox." (Proverbs 14:4).

The third is like the face of a man. Man's place in creation is his intelligence and understanding, being made in the image of God:

“Then God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27).

The fourth is like an eagle. The eagle is the most majestic bird in the sky. Scripture says:

“There are three things, which are too wonderful for me, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky.” (Proverbs 30:18-19a).

In Ezekiel 1:5-24, the living creatures are shown with four wings and having wheels within wheels. Here in Revelation they have six wings but no mention is made of wheels. Keep in mind that the imagery in Revelation is symbolic, even as we have already seen that the seven lamps of fire represent the seven spirits of God, and yet there is only one Holy Spirit. Whatever their symbology, the four living creatures teach us about God's creation praising His name through their representation of four of God's achievements: the lion, ox, man and eagle..

The beloved hymn “Holy Holy Holy” captures in words and music this awe-inspiring scene in Revelation where the four living creatures give testimony to God's power. Some have wondered why the creatures say “holy” three times. Some teachers have said this is a Jewish way of expressing certitude to a truth, meaning, saying it three times gives credence and solidifies it. That may be so, but I have a simpler understanding. They are bearing witness to the Trinity: Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son and Holy is the Spirit. We have seen the Father on the throne, and we have seen the Holy Spirit as the seven lamps of fire. In the next chapter we shall see the Son.

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.’” (Rev 4:9-11)

When the four living creatures worship, we the Church of Jesus Christ, the overcomers who received rulership, thrones and crowns, fall before our God and worship Him and cast our crowns before His throne. Why do we do this? Because we have been saved by grace, a free gift without any merit on our part. Knowing this, we know we have no intrinsic right to wear those crowns. They were a gift to us, and we cast them before God to say to Him, “You are the reason we have these, O Lord, and so the credit and honor and praise is really Yours -- You alone truly deserve it!”

God is the eternal Creator, and it was He who initiated salvation for us in our rebellion called sin.

“For God [the Father on the throne] so loved the world that He [the Father] gave His only begotten Son [Jesus], that whoever [you and me] believes in Him [Jesus] shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

Friend, if you are reading this and do not yet know if you have the priceless gift of eternal life, receive it now. Pray:

“Father God, who sits on the throne, I admit I have rebelled against you in my sins. I deserve death. Yet, You so loved me, that You sent Jesus to earth to die on the cross for my sins, in my place as a substitute for me, so I wouldn't have to die and go to hell. I now place my trust in Jesus, and receive Him as my Savior, Master and Lord. Thank you, O great and awesome and gracious God Almighty for Your gift of the forgiveness of my sins and eternal life with You through Jesus Your Son. Thank You that He rose again from the dead on the third day, and that I too will one day be resurrected like Jesus and live forever. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”

Chapter Five

The Lion and the Lamb

“I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?' And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.” (Rev 5:1-4)

John sees a book in God the Father's right hand. This book is the divine plan to judge and punish sin. It has seven seals on it. In earthly affairs, a king would write a proclamation or other royal decree, and then when it was ready to be sent, he'd drip hot wax onto the parchment to seal it; before the wax cooled, a royal ring or other device would be pressed into the wax, leaving an impression. This seal meant that the contents of the document were, upon pain of death, to be opened and read only by the designated authorized person.

A strong angel proclaims, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” This was a formal legal challenge for the authorized person to step forward. Apparently, a search was made--everywhere! In all of heaven, not a believer nor any angelic being, could qualify to open the seals. The search turned to earth. No one on earth, human or otherwise (meaning angel or demon), qualified there. Then, as if desperate to find someone, anyone, a search is even made under the earth in the nether reaches of the dead who are lost in their sins awaiting Judgment Day. All creation is searched, thoroughly. No one was found who qualified.

This made John weep. Why? Because the scroll is God's plan for the judgment of sin. If no one can break the seals, then sin would never be finally punished. The persecution of believers would not be avenged. John himself was the last living apostle, the others having died by violence for their faith in Jesus. John wept because these men, his brothers in Christ, would not be avenged. If no one could break the seals, evil would win. All the sorrow and pain would not have been worth it, because evil would 'get away with it.'

Is it any wonder that John wept?

Joyfully, the tears were going to end!

“and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals. And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.’” (Rev 5:5-7)

Up to this point, we have seen the Father on His throne, and the Holy Spirit. Now we see the third member of the Trinity, Jesus, who is God the Son. He has many titles throughout the New Testament, such as “the Word”, “the way, the truth and the life” and “the good shepherd.” As

we said at the beginning of Revelation chapter 4, the emphasis of Revelation from that point on is Jewish in style, flavor and nature. So it is here that the names ascribed to Him are Old Testament names that Israelites would recognize.

First He is identified as “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah.” When the patriarch Jacob was about to die, he called his twelve sons together and prophesied over them. To Judah he said:

“Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches, he lies down as a lion. And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes. And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.” (Genesis 49:8-10)

Jesus was of the lineage of Judah:

“The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham; Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.” (Matthew 1:1-2).

Jesus is also Shiloh, which means Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and the prophecy tells that “to him [Jesus] shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

The elder also tells the Apostle John that Jesus is “the Root of David.”

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit...Then in that day the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.” (Isaiah 11:1,10)

Jesse was the father of the shepherd boy David who killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:1-58) and grew up to become King over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-4). Jesus is that “root” of Jesse, and David, and all his descendants. Christians, you never know if the child you are raising will be the next David, so raise your children well in the fear of the Lord.

In the scene in Revelation, John's tears cease as he beholds “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,” even as he, the Apostle John, wrote about in his gospel:

“The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, ‘Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!’” (John 1:29)

Every son of Israel understood John the Baptist's proclamation to mean the Passover Lamb that was slain each Passover to remember when Israel was in Egypt. Confronting Egypt's reliance on false gods, God promised to slay all the first born in the land, but made provision that if a lamb were sacrifice and its blood applied to the lintel and doorposts, the Lord would see the blood and pass over that house, sparing the inhabitants in it.

“Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go and take for yourselves lambs, according to your families, and slay the Passover lamb. You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.’” (Exodus 12:21-23).

The two doorposts stand on either side of the door, while the lintel is the crosspiece at the top of the doorframe. Notice that when a Hebrew took a hyssop branch bunch with the lamb's blood, and then applied it to the top, and then to the two sides, he was drawing with blood the geometric figure of a cross! The bloody death on the cross of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was foreshadowed in the Passover ceremony, and in fact, happened on Passover Day. When a soul today takes refuge under the cross of Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins, as in that day so long ago, the Lord will today also see the blood of Jesus, foreshadowed by the cross drawn in blood by striking the lintel and two sides, and pass over that soul so as to not smite him.

The Apostle John not only sees Jesus as a lamb that was slain, but also standing alive. This represents the resurrection of Jesus. The horn is a symbol of power, and the number seven is a symbol of completeness or perfection, so the seven horns represent that Jesus is perfect in power, meaning all-powerful and therefore showing that He is God. The seven eyes are yet another reference to the 7-fold ministry of the one Holy Spirit as described in Isaiah 11:2. That those eyes are “sent out into all the earth” reminds us of God searching the hearts of men:

“For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.” (2 Chronicles 16:9a).

I have one last thought about the search for someone to break the Seals, and open the book. They had searched all creation, but they were looking in the wrong place. The answer wasn't in the creation, but in the Creator. Jesus is the Creator (see Colossians 1:15-16) and God the Son. He truly is worthy of our praise and worship. He overcame death on the cross, paying for all our sins, and now lives again, God who is blessed forever. With held breaths every eye in heaven watches as Jesus came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.' Then rejoicing bursts out, starting with those closest to the throne.

“When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb, each one holding harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and break its seals, for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’” (Rev 5:8-10).

For all the stereotypes of what heaven must be like, here at least we find one, that of harps in heaven, as being true, for the elders have them. Music, singing and songs are a gift from God to mankind, and it is exceedingly pleasing to Him when we lift our voices to sing to Him with

hearts full of praise and worship. Pleasing also are the prayers of the saints, which here are seen as incense contained in golden bowls.

The Church of Jesus Christ is composed of believers “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” The statement of Peter to Christians, “you are...a royal priesthood” is again seen demonstrated in this new song: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’ And every created thing, which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ And the four living creatures kept saying ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshipped.” (Rev 5:11-14).

The elders and living creatures were the first to praise Jesus. Now, all the angels join in. We are told their number is thousands of thousands, which means millions, and myriads of myriads, which is 10,000 x 10,000, or 100,000,000 (one hundred million.) There are hundreds of millions of angels, and millions more, and these along with the elders and living creatures, shout out God's praises with a loud voice.

Finally, all the rest of creation joins in on the festival of praise. Paul wrote of this celebration:

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11).

When the scene in Revelation 5 occurs, the prophecy in Philippians will be fulfilled. At this point in time, Satan and his demons will know their time is short. When Jesus confronted the demonized man, Legion, the demons appealed to Him:

“What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:29b).

Satan and all his demonic forces of darkness know well that their days are numbered. This praise festival lets them know the time of their coming torment is approaching. By Jesus taking the book from God the Father's right hand, the cataclysmic war of Good versus Evil has begun in earnest.

Chapter 6 Prequel

Daniel's 70 Weeks

Before progressing into Revelation 6, a few explanations are useful to get a better understanding of end-times prophecy. To understand the future, we need to first go back to the past. As stated before, Revelation 4 and onward have a distinctly Jewish style and nature to them. As we saw in Revelation 5, Jesus is identified, not with New Testament names, but with Old Testament names familiar to Jewish people. This is not an accident on God's part. With the Rapture of the Church closing out the Church Age in Revelation 4:1, God now turns His attention back to finishing up business with His people Israel, who are going to occupy center stage of the world's attention and actions.

Long ago, God called Abram (later renamed Abraham), and promised to make his descendants more numerous than he could count.

“And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the LORD, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:5–6)

God also told him his descendants would serve as slaves:

“God said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.’” (Genesis 15:13–14)

This latter prophecy was fulfilled, and the book of Exodus tells the story. Israel went through a time of getting settled in, which is covered in the book of Judges. Then God sent prophets and gave kings to the people of Israel. As the centuries passed, the people of Israel kept falling into idolatry and other disobedience to God. Someone has said it is as though Israel had made a national pastime of disobeying God. Finally, God had had enough, and sent Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to overthrow Israel. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God told them:

“For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.’” (Jeremiah 29:10)

Shift forward to the book of Daniel. Daniel had been a young man, a teenager, when he and three Hebrew friends were taken into captivity in Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. After some adventures, Daniel grew old, and was reading his Scriptures when he came across the prophecy in Jeremiah.

“In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.” (Daniel 9:2)

Daniel had been there almost 70 years and the time of Jerusalem's desolations was almost over. He set himself to pray and fast and seek God about the matter. God sent the angel Gabriel, the same angel who announced the Virgin Birth to a young Jewish woman named Mary, to tell Daniel that Israel's destiny would be completed, not in 70 years, but in 70 "weeks" of years, or $70 \times 7 \text{ years} = 490 \text{ years}$. These years are comprised of Hebrew lunar months of 30 days each, so each of these prophesied years is 360 days, not 365 days as seen in our western calendars.

"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place." (Daniel 9:24)

The starting point in time for the 490 years was clearly identified by Gabriel:

"So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress." (Daniel 9:25)

Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and lay in desolate ruins. Years later, Nehemiah, a Jew who was a cupbearer to the king, obtained the prophesied decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem:

"And I said to the king, 'If it please the king, let letters be given me for the governors of the provinces beyond the river, that they may allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the fortress which is by the temple, for the wall of the city and for the house to which I will go.' And the king granted them to me because the good hand of my God was on me." (Nehemiah 2:7-8)

That event in Nehemiah's day gave the starting time of the 490 years.

Now, while 70 weeks (490 years) is the total time span for the prophecy, the time the Messiah would come would occur after 69 weeks had elapsed (i.e., the "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" in verse 25, where $7 + 62 = 69$). As the 69-week period (483 years) came to its conclusion, on the very last day, Jesus was presented to Israel as the Messiah on Palm Sunday. At Jesus' command, His disciples obtained a donkey colt to ride on in fulfillment of prophecy.

"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, and brought the donkey and colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!'" (Matthew 21:4-9)

Though the people greeted Him with Messianic fervor, He knew they did not truly believe in Him and would turn on Him to crucify Him only days later.

“When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes...because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.’” (Luke 19:41–42, 44b)

What did Jesus mean by “the time of your visitation?” If the Jewish rulers had believed their Scriptures, they would have calculated those 69 weeks of Daniel’s prophecy to find out when Messiah would be presented to them. Their own book of Nehemiah gave them the starting date, and they could have checked their calendar calculations to realize the last day of the 69th week was upon them—here was Jesus riding in to Messianic acclaim in fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9! But, they didn’t believe it. They “did not recognize the time of [their] visitation.”

The prophecy concerning the 70 weeks continues:

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.” (Daniel 9:26)

The 7 weeks (49 years) had elapsed, followed by 62 more weeks (additional 434 years). The prophecy says “after” the 62 weeks, the Messiah “will be cut off,” which is another way of saying Messiah would be put to death. We know that Jesus made His appearance as Messiah on Palm Sunday, which was the last day of the 483 years, and just a few days later He was put on trial, crucified, died and was buried. The following Sunday He rose from the dead.

This sequence reveals several important things. First, God’s prophecies ALWAYS come true. Since prophecies in the past became 100 percent true, so other prophecies in the future can be trusted to be fulfilled. Second, the first 69 weeks were all sequential—as soon as one week was finished, the next began. Third, the final week of the prophecy, the 70th week, is NOT sequential. In other words, it didn’t follow immediately after the end of the 69th week, but actually still awaits a future fulfillment.

There are several developments in the 70 weeks prophecy that support a gap in time between the 69th and 70th weeks. First, the Messiah being cut off happened several days after the 69th week, but before the 70th week. Second, a prophecy was made that Jerusalem and the temple would both be destroyed, which Titus and the Roman legions fulfilled when they overthrew Jerusalem and destroyed the temple in A.D. 70. Another part in the Daniel prophecy further demonstrating a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks is found in Daniel 9:26b: “And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.”

A long period of time would have to occur between the 69th and 70th weeks if war would be ongoing “even to the end.” Moreover, the land would be in desolation for a long, indefinite period “even to the end.” Yet, because the first 69 weeks happened exactly as prophesied, including the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, followed hundreds of years later by the re-

destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, then we know that the 70th week is still certain to come to a prophetic fulfillment.

After Messiah was “cut off,” God put His plans for Israel on hold and chose to work in and through the Church. The long period of desolation for Israel between the 69th and 70th weeks is filled with the Church Age. However, once the Church is Raptured, God will resume dealing with Israel to fulfill her destiny, and the great cosmic countdown of the 70th week will begin! It is by this 70th week that we know the Tribulation period will be 7 years long, where each year is 360 days.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote of Israel and the Gentiles in word imagery, contrasting a cultivated olive tree (Israel) and a wild olive tree (Gentiles). He made the point that God broke off Israel like olive branches broken off the cultivated tree, and grafted in the wild Gentiles. (Romans 11:17–20) A day is coming when the wild olive branches of the Gentiles will themselves be broken off, and the cultivated olive branches of the Jews will be grafted in again. (Romans 11:21–24)

Finally, Paul put it all together:

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” (Romans 11:25)

The “fullness of the Gentiles” is the time in the Church Age when as many Gentiles as will be saved is completed. When that fullness is reached, the Rapture takes the Church out of the way; the Gentile “branches” are broken off, and the Jewish “branches” are regrafted in. This is why Revelation turns Jewish in style and flavor in chapter 4 and beyond—the Rapture ends the time of the Gentiles, and the time of Israel returns.

Remember, too, God's declaration through Gabriel is that the prophecy had been decreed “for your people and your holy city”. The final seven years of Daniel's 70th Week (what we call the Tribulation period) is all about the physical descendants of Israel and the physical city of Jerusalem, not the Church consisting of saved individuals from every nation, tribe, people and tongue. Those final seven years are Jewish in God's plans, focus and intent. He is finishing up promises made to His people Israel. God always keeps His promises..

Since the 70th week (consisting of 7 lunar years, each having 360 days) is the framework for the coming Tribulation period, there are other things we can learn about the Tribulation period from this prophecy:

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” (Daniel 9:27)

First, we can see that a covenant of 7 years' duration will be put into effect. Since the 70 weeks prophecy is about Israel's destiny, Israel would certainly be involved in it. But, notice something history reveals: After the Romans overthrew the nation of Israel, there was NO nation of Israel for some 1,900 years! So, for there to be a covenant involving Israel, the Jews would have to return to their land again and become a nation once more. To the astonishment of people around the world, this happened on May 14, 1948.

Second, covenants are by their nature not just with one person or party. This covenant is "with the many." Likely it will involve other nations as well as Israel.

Third, we see the covenant lasts only for one-half of the agreed time, for the one who makes the covenant breaks it at the middle point. The "prince who is to come" (verse 26) is the "he" (verse 27) who makes the "firm covenant" and then breaks it halfway through. The people who destroyed Jerusalem (verse 26) were the Romans, so the covenant maker and breaker (verse 27) is a ruler over a modern empire arising out of the old Roman Empire. Bible scholars call this man the Antichrist.

Fourth, notice that the old Jewish sacrificial system will be once more practiced in Israel, for the Antichrist puts "a stop to sacrifice and grain offering."

Fifth, since sacrifices and grain offerings will once again be practiced in Israel, and they were practiced in a temple of God, this means a temple will be built again in Jerusalem.

Sixth, it tells us that in the middle of the seven covenanted years, the Antichrist commits a hateful act, an "abomination," that makes the temple desolate, meaning it will be unfit for the purposes of calling on the true God. We will see more on this later, for this "abomination of desolation" is pivotal to all that happens in the Tribulation period's seven years.

Seventh, this prophecy tells us that the desolation caused by the Antichrist will continue until he is completely destroyed.

In his groundbreaking and best-selling work, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Christian author and teacher Hal Lindsey made the deeply grave and thoughtful observation, "There will be no material advantage to being alive on earth during the time of the reign of the Antichrist." This is so true. The seven years of the Tribulation period will be so severe that Jesus said, "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved." (Matthew 24:22a)

The God of the universe calls us to repent, to change our minds and very hearts now, while there is still yet time:

"For He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" (2 Corinthians 6:2)

Reader, turn to God now while the door of forgiveness is still open. To turn away now may fix your choice for all eternity, for tomorrow is promised to no one.

Chapter Six

“Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, 'Come.' I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.” (Revelation 6:1-2)

Jesus is both the Lion and Lamb. When we think of those two animals, they are as far apart in nature as can be. The lion is a predator, the lamb the prey. A lion is the mighty creature of strength and ferocity, with claws and teeth to rend and kill. The lamb is a baby sheep, a gentle creature, meek and mild, defenseless. You would think that it would be in the role of a lion that Jesus would make war on a Mankind rebellious and defiant against God and Him. Yet, it is so like God that He does things contrary to how a human thinks. When Jesus came the first time, you have expected the King of Kings would be born in a palace; yet, He chose to be born in a stable. He was fit to be clothed in rich royal clothing; yet, He was wrapped in swaddling cloth, which was used to wrap a dead body for burial.

It is in His role as the Lamb that made propitiation for the sins of men that Jesus opens the seals. Paul quotes David, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.” (Romans 4:8) Here in Revelation 6, the men and women of earth, rather than being blessed as David says, will find the opposite to be true, that their sins will now be taken into account. It is appropriate that the One they rejected and despised is the very One who will now reject and despise them, and that the One who was slain to pay for their sins will now make them pay for their sins and slay them. David also wrote:

“Why are the nations in an uproar and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against His anointed, saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!' ...Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way. For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in him!” (Psalms 2:1-3, 10-12)

David's warning for the leaders of the earth to do homage so “that He not become angry” falls on deaf ears here in Revelation. Indeed, the warning that “His wrath may soon be kindled” has now, at the breaking of the seals, become a reality.

The rider on a white horse is the one Bible scholars call “The Antichrist.” I believe his rise to power is ordained by God in parallel to what Scripture says of Pharaoh in Moses’ day:

“For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'" (Romans 9:17)

Pharaoh was a man rebellious and defiant of the true God. God put him into power on the throne so that God might judge all Egypt. Now, with the breaking of the first seal, God puts into power

on the throne of the world a man rebellious and defiant of the true God so that He may judge, not merely Egypt, but the entire world.

This man, the Antichrist (later called in Revelation “the Beast”), has a bow, not a sword. The sword was the weapon of choice for combat that is 'up close and personal.' A spear was effective either in hand-to-hand, or could be thrown a little distance. The bow, however, allowed combat at a distance farther than even a spear could be thrown to slay men before they could get close enough to do you harm; also, it allowed the killing of a victim whom you could not catch on foot, whose distance would afford him the opportunity to escape you. The bow, therefore, was the most advanced weapon of its day, and it may well be that the Antichrist will be possessed of the most advanced weapons ever conceived by the mind of man. Later in Revelation, the wondering world exclaims, “Who is like the Beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” (Rev 13:4b) His will be the most advanced and dazzling warfare Man has ever seen -- no one will be able to resist him. The first Seal says of the Antichrist, “He went forth conquering and to conquer.”

As our last point, we are told, “a crown was given to him.” His rise to power is fast, as abruptly as a crown being handed to him. Again, later in Revelation, we are told he receives this authority “in one hour.” (Rev 17:12) So it is, in the breaking of the first seal, that we see the rapid rise to power of the conquering Antichrist. More will be said about him later. God will put into power a new Pharaoh over all the earth so that He may judge all the earth.

“When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come.' And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.” (Revelation 6:3-4)

This horse is red, the color of shed blood, and this is most fitting, for he starts a worldwide armed conflict on a scale never before seen. He is given “a great sword” so that “men would slay one another.” The sword symbolizes warfare and bloodshed, and the fact that this is a 'great' sword forebodes terrible slaughter and death on a gigantic scale. The world has already seen World War I and World War II, and after the rise of the Antichrist will see yet another World War. Men called World War I “the war to end all wars,” so terrifying and awesome was its scope and ferocity. Never had such a horror of so many casualties ever been seen. It was then that the first weapon of mass destruction was introduced: poison gas. Yet, a few decades later, World War II broke upon the world, and a whole new scale of warfare surpassed what had happened in the First World War. Moreover, WWII introduced a new weapon of mass destruction: the atomic bomb. The death toll for this Great War far exceeded the previous war.

Now with the breaking of the second seal, a new World War will break upon the earth, and it will surpass all that have gone before it. Since we already know the Antichrist will be unbeatable in waging war, and that he goes forth “conquering and to conquer,” there can be no doubt the death toll of this prophesied World War is due at least in part to his hand in it. With so many nuclear weapons built and spread among the nations of earth, it seems unthinkable to presume that this next world war would not include atomic (fission) and hydrogen (fusion) nuclear bombs. Fusion is so much more powerful than fission, that one large hydrogen bomb could be

the equivalent of up to 1,000 atomic bombs like that dropped on Japan in World War II, all set off together in all all-consuming blast. Moreover, it is also possible some new exotic weapons and defenses will be used, such as advanced lasers, tesla domes, or zero-point energy weapons. However it finally turns out, we are talking nuclear war -- or worse!

“When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come!’ I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.’” (Revelation 6:5-6)

The third rider is mounted on a black horse. The blackness of the horse may not be merely a symbol of gloom and cheerlessness. If indeed nuclear weapons are used en masse, there may be a time of dark nuclear winter, a time of so much dust carried into the atmosphere by nuclear mushroom clouds that it blocks the sunlight from getting to the earth. Not only will crops be directly destroyed by nuclear weapons, but the lack of sunshine will harm those crops that survived.

Most of the nations in the world do not produce enough food to feed themselves, so they import grain from the few nations that annually produce a surplus, among them being Canada, the United States, Australia and Russia. If a nuclear war broke out, nearly all the importing and exporting of surplus grain around the world would cease. Famine will spread around the entire globe in unprecedented scope and severity. Prices for food will soar.

The prophecy says “a quart of wheat for a denarius.” A quart is about what is needed to make a loaf of bread. Since the denarius was equivalent to a day's wages, this foreboding prophecy means it will take all that a man earns in a single day to buy a single load of bread, if it can be purchased at all. Barley is considered a less costly grain because it is not as in demand as wheat, and three barley loaves will be available for that single day's wage.

The fact that oil and wine are not damaged may indicate that the areas of the earth that produce these will not be as affected as other places on earth. Oil, as understood more than 1,900 years ago when Revelation was written, was that obtained from vegetables like olives, and was used in cooking, medicine and for light from lamps. Wine, of course, comes from grapes. Both of these crops grow prominently in European and Middle East countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, so it may be this region will escape nuclear destruction.

Since the greatest number of nuclear weapons are owned by the United States and Russia, and also since a great deal of surplus grain comes from these two countries, and since these two nations have had nuclear missiles and bombs aimed at each other for many a decade, it seems that most likely the prophesied nuclear war will break out between these two countries. Canada, of course, borders the United States and would certainly be affected by an all-out nuclear attack on America.

Now, I have admittedly given a lot of 'if' this and 'if' that in the above scenario about American and Russia. Is there any evidence that such a conflict is prophesied between them? Sadly, I

believe the answer is 'Yes.' In an extended prophecy found in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, God addresses a future invasion of Israel headed by Gog of the land of Magog. This land is said to be “from the remote parts of the north” (Ezekiel 38:6 and 38:15) and “the remotest part of the north” (Ezekiel 39:2). Directions regarding Israel are with regard to Israel's geographic location. If we take out a map of the world and find Israel, and then go to the remote north, there is only one nation there: Russia. This ruler “Gog” is said to get an evil thought (Ezekiel 38:10) in his mind to go invade Israel along with allies, chief of which is Persia a.k.a. modern Iran. (Ezekiel 38:5) A huge army is assembled and brought against Israel. God personally stops the invasion “on the mountains of Israel” and “on the open field” (Ezekiel 39:2-5); then He sends destruction by fire against the land of Magog, which would be Russia, and against some others living on the far side of the world away from Israel. (Ezekiel 39:6)

The United States has made some moves at decommissioning its long range nuclear weapons. Even if the USA and all the nations on Earth did not have so much as a match to light a candle with, God says He will send fire upon "Magog" (Russia) and them that "dwell carelessly in the coastlands" (USA). God doesn't NEED nuclear weapons to do His will.

There was neither a Russia nor a United States of America 2,600 years ago when Ezekiel wrote the prophecy, but the Gog-Magog prophecy has never been fulfilled anytime in history; indeed, it is specifically for the End-Times, for it says the invasion will occur “...in the latter years....” It also uses a peculiar expression that they would 'go up against the land of unwalled villages.' (Ezekiel 38:11) In ancient times, villages had walls to keep out invaders, robbers and wild animals. When gunpowder was invented, walls became less effective, and by modern times, with artillery, tanks and airplanes, military forces can go over--or through--village walls. Most modern cities are “unwalled villages.” In any event, it may be this Gog-Magog invasion is what occurs at the breaking of the second seal, which triggers World War III. When the nuclear arsenals have been exhausted, the USA and Russia will be taken out of the picture, so to speak, and Europe and the Antichrist are free to ascend to mastery over the world.

However it works out in the involvement of specific nations, and who will be fighting whom with what weapons, there is no question that Antichrist will ascend to the throne, a new World War will break out, and worldwide famine will follow. God alone truly knows the future, and has revealed it to us in His awesome book of Revelation.

“When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature, saying, 'Come.' I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.” (Revelation 6:8-8)

The horror of the previous three seals reaches its culmination with Death personified as the fourth rider and Hades (meaning the grave, not the fiery doom of Hell) following him. The horse is ashen, or pale, the color of a human corpse. They are authorized to kill a fourth of the earth. Think about that a moment. At current population figures for the earth at about seven billion, even if there were a billion taken in the Rapture, one-fourth of the Earth's population still comes to about 1-1/2 billion (1,500,000,000) deaths. That is more deaths than from the combined deaths

from all the wars Mankind has ever fought from the beginning of the human race until today! We are told the deaths come about from the sword, which is the second seal; famine, which is the third seal; and pestilence and wild beasts. With so many deaths from the second seal's World War, it would be literally impossible to bury all the bodies. Disease would fester and spread from hundreds of millions of rotting corpses, and the stench of death would be like nothing man has ever experienced or imagined. If we add to this horror the possibility of germ warfare as weapons of mass destruction from the arsenals of the nations unleashed, then it is any wonder pestilence rages unchecked? Finally, the famine across the globe is so terrible, animals cannot get enough to eat, so they turn in desperate starvation to attack and devour people.

One-fourth (25%) of the earth is killed. Some sincere people have argued that this is one-fourth of the earth's surface area, meaning the geographic area, not one-fourth of the population, and by this they are trying to soften the blow, being uncomfortable about the harshness of the reality of the death toll. To that, we have to ask, 'What difference does population-versus-geography make?' Jesus said, "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved." (Matthew 24:22a) That, ladies and gentleman, is a 100% death toll, so let's not play games of population-versus-geography over how to measure that 25%. Unless God cut the days short, NO ONE would survive!

So, again we say, one-fourth of the earth is killed...and this is but the first half of the Tribulation period. From here, it gets worse.

"When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and these cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also." (Rev 6:9-11)

It needs to be said here that there is a lot more going on in the Tribulation's seven years than just the judgment of God revealed in the 7 seals, 7 trumpets and 7 bowls. Not only is the proud and arrogant Antichrist arisen in political and military might, but also there are religious faith issues occurring. God's ancient enemy, Satan, has since the beginning of his rebellion desired to be worshipped as God. Isaiah wrote about Satan, formerly called Lucifer (which means 'star of the morning'):

The King James Version starts this way: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" The New American Standard Version says: "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of the assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:12-14)

Yes, Lucifer, Satan, the Devil, has desired to make himself like “the Most High.” In his vanity he dared to want to usurp God's place as “the Most High.” No doubt he was an incredible creation of God filled with light and beauty. Further description of him was given to us as Ezekiel wrote:

“You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the ruby, the topaz and the diamond; the beryl, the onyx and the jasper; the lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, was in you. On the day you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you out as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, even from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you.” (Ezekiel 28:12b-17)

In the passage above, we see that the devil was originally incredibly beautiful, as like a covering of every precious jewel. As the moon has no light of its own, but shines as a reflection of the light of the sun, so Lucifer reflected the glory and beauty of the light that is God. There is a Greek myth of a man named Narcissus, who saw his reflection and fell in love with himself. Satan is the ultimate narcissist, for he took his eyes off the beauty of God and looked upon himself reflecting God's light, and thought that light and glory was his own. Metaphorically, it would be like the moon thinking its light was its own instead of being a reflection of the sun. The Ezekiel passage above also says Lucifer was “internally filled with violence.” Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees who intended evil against Him:

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning...” (John 8:44a)

The devil wanted God's position as “the Most High.” That position is a solitary one, meaning for one person only--Satan could not share it with God. That old devil was filled with violence, and a murderer. The inescapable conclusion is that the devil's great crime, the thing that made him an implacable enemy of God, was not merely that he disobeyed God, but that he intended to murder God, and take His throne! God cast him out of His presence, and bereft of God's light, the angel who wanted to be God became instead the prince of darkness and the “god of this world.” (2 Cor 4:4)

With the start of the seven years of the Tribulation period, having failed to seize God's throne, the devil will be exerting all that he can do to set up the world of humans to make him, Lucifer, their god, so that they will worship him. Such a hellish objective will brook no interference or exceptions. After the Rapture, though the Christian Church is gone, the gospel will go out to the uttermost reaches of the earth through new agents of God (about whom more will be said later.) There will arise a new generation of believers (called saints after Revelation 4:1) who will not bow the knee to the would-be usurper of God's throne, Satan. At the middle of the Tribulation's seven years, Satan will, in and through the Antichrist, make his claim to divinity to get that

worship as god that he so deeply desired and was willing to do violence against God to get it. That point in time of his claim is what Daniel 9:27 called “the abomination of desolation.”

Believers in the true God will not worship him, so the Antichrist will go forth to kill them in a terrible slaughter. Here in the fifth seal opened by Jesus, the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the world, we see the horrible aftermath of that hellish bloodbath. These souls are gathered under the altar of God in heaven, and cry out for vengeance for their murder, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

The expression “those who dwell on the earth” means people living on earth who have not believed, but are lost in their sins, and are rebellious and defiant toward God and Jesus. Just as Jesus said to the Jews, “and you are unwilling to come to me so that you may have life” (John 5:40), so it is concerning “those who dwell on the earth” that they too are unwilling to believe. Their problem is not that they ‘can not’ believe, but rather that they ‘will not’ believe. Worse than that, they pursue and kill those who do believe, thereby being murderers like their father the devil who was a murderer from the beginning.

The martyrs are told to be patient “for a little while longer.” There is a principle with God to allow evildoers to fill up the cup of their wickedness, and to wait on judgment against them until that happens. In Genesis 15:13-15, God told Abram of the future generations of his descendants, and how they would be slaves in a foreign land; their return to the land God promised Abram would have to wait four generations. Why that long? Because “the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.” (Genesis 15:16). God was waiting for the Amorites to grow completely bad in their sin before judging them.

It is the same here for the martyrs revealed in the fifth seal as God tells them that “they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” With the last murder of the last martyr, the iniquity of “those who dwell on the earth” will be completed, even as the iniquity of the Amorites was completed when the Israelites were delivered from Egypt and led by God back to that very place at which God had spoken to Abram. By this point in time, which is after the middle of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will have made his 'abomination of desolation' and his followers will have murdered believers in the true God. Now it is time for 'pay back!'

“I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wing. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Revelation 6:12-17)

Up to this point, the judgments Jesus has revealed on earth could be explained away as natural events done by the hand of Mankind. Even the judgment of letting Mankind complete its fill of wickedness is a man-vs.-man issue. Now, God steps in with a direct hand. When the last martyr who is ordained to be killed has died, heaven breaks loose on earth! An earthquake, a 'great' one, shakes the earth. This quake will likely be the strongest yet experienced in Man's history, for Revelation says "every mountain and island were moved out of their place." Such destruction is almost beyond imagination. No power on earth can do such a thing, and the murderers on earth will know God is doing this. Next, the sun becomes pitch black and the moon turns blood red. This is no mere celestial occasion like a solar eclipse, but an act of God.

This outer space event is prophesied elsewhere in Scripture:

"The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness." (Joel 3:15)

"For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light." (Isaiah 13:10)

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (Matthew 24:29)

The passage in Matthew is parallel in Mark 13:24-25 and Luke 21:25. When the prophecy says "the stars of the sky fell to the earth," it is not speaking of the gigantic gaseous balls of glowing energy throughout outer space which are vastly larger than planet earth, but of celestial objects such as meteors. Even today with all our technology and know-how, we still refer to meteorites entering and burning up in our atmosphere in long brilliant trails as 'shooting stars.' Revelation says these 'stars' fell "as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind." Such unripe figs assuredly do not burn up in the atmosphere, but strike the ground with a thud in abundance; so, this falling of stars seems to indicate numerous and massive meteor strikes around the earth. Hollywood motion pictures, such as Armageddon and Deep Impact, demonstrated the possibilities of what celestial objects colliding with the earth could do, even to the point of threatening to extinguish all life on earth.

Yet, even this sequence of events, earthquake, unprecedented sun and moon darkening, meteor strikes, yes, even all this pales in comparison with what happens next!

"The sky was split apart like a scroll." Remember, this time of the Tribulation's seven years is not just about politics and life in general, but about the direct confrontation of God with the Satan and those who follow him. Apparently, the very fabric of space-and-time, of reality itself, is peeled aside, and those who are on earth can see directly up into heaven and see God the Father on His throne and Jesus the Lamb whose sacrifice they rejected, full of wrath over the murder of their godly followers. This view terrifies the unbelievers beyond anything! All the unbelievers, of whatever rank or wealth possessing, cry out in terror to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:14-17)

Even if the mountains and rocks were to heed and obey, and fall on them, it would not suffice to shield them from the Father and Jesus in their holy wrath.

“And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:13)

To their utmost terror, there is NO hiding from God!

Finally, these terrified unbelievers ask the question, "...and who is able to stand?" In the next chapter, Revelation 7, their question will be answered.

Chapter Seven

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind could blow upon the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.'" (Rev. 7:1-3)

How different life on earth will be after the Rapture has snatched all genuine Christians from the earth! In today's world (prior to the Rapture as I write this), we have mass media like newspapers, magazines, radio, television, cable tv, computer networks, and the Internet. Not only does satellite communication make "live" television reporting possible, live cameras around the world are connected to the Internet so things can be viewed in real time as they happen. In our materialistic-oriented world we do not see or hear angels, or experience cosmic disturbances of Divine origin like what we just covered in the sixth seal. Life goes on. In fact, things are so ordinary, so "non" spiritual, that many today (in ironic fulfillment of prophecy) make the foolish mistake of ruling out God and impending Divine judgment:

"Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation...' but by His word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, kept for the day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-4, 7).

The people we saw in the sixth seal were mockers such of which Peter warned us, experiencing the beginning of God's wrath and vengeance for the murderous slaughter of so many of His precious believers (as seen in the fifth seal.) As God shakes the world and causes meteors to crash on the earth, and turns the sun black and the moon blood red, and then splits apart the sky for all to see the very God whose day of judgment they scorned, they then cry out in terror, "...for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Chapter Seven of Revelation gives God's answer to their question, "who is able to stand?" The chapter begins by showing four of God's angels setting aside the winds of earth. It's a supernatural moment of utter stillness upon the earth. Considering that at any given moment a thunderstorm, or a gale, or a hurricane/monsoon/typhoon is occurring somewhere on earth, this is an eerie and ominous moment, literally (as the saying goes), "The calm before the storm." An angel is then said to ascend from "the rising of the sun."

Contrast this with evil arising from "the bottomless pit" (Rev 9:2-3). This good angel has the "seal of the living God," which will be used to put the seal of God on the foreheads of certain bond-servants of God. The Greek word translated "bond-servant" is "doulos," a word the Apostle Paul loved to use to describe his relationship to Christ (Romans 1:1). From this we understand these bond-servants in Revelation 7 are believers in Jesus Christ, having come to faith after the Rapture. The fact they will be sealed on their foreheads means everyone will clearly see to Whom they belong. This is in contrast to the devilish 666 mark on people's forehead or right

hand, about which we will learn more in Revelation 13. The seal of God means these bond-servants will be supernaturally protected from the effects of the trumpet and bowl judgments about to smite the earth.

"And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed" (Rev 7:4-8).

The bond-servants being sealed for protection against God's judgment are literal, flesh-and-blood descendants of Israel, 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. As noted earlier in this study on the book of Revelation, once the Church is Raptured, God returns to dealing with the nation and people of Israel. These 144,000 are the firstfruits (Rev 14:4), or first souls saved, of the preaching of the gospel after the Rapture has taken Christians from the earth. While many people today know that Israel had twelve sons, and these comprised the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve names that are listed here in Revelation 7 have two oddities about them that differ from the original twelve.

First, the tribe of Dan is missing, being replaced with the half-tribe of Manasseh (Deut 3:13). Apparently Manasseh gets promoted to the status of a full tribe. But, why would God delete Dan? The answer lies in a warning God gave Israel through Moses about turning away from Him: "...that there will not be among you a man, woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away from the Lord..." (Deut 29:18-21). It seems that the tribe of Dan indeed turned its heart away from the Lord, so it does not get listed among the twelve tribes of Israel at the end of time.

The second oddity of this list of the twelve tribes of Israel is that the tribes are not listed in their genealogical birth-order, as is traditional and customary. Christian author Bill Salus noted that nothing in the Bible is there by accident. Thanks to his insight, we find that the rearrangement of the order of the names actually gives us a startling prophetic message.

To discover this message, we need to look at the scenes in the Bible when each son was born and read the short soliloquy given by the parent as the reason for the name given the boy. Here are, in their traditional genealogical birth order, the boy's names and the words spoke about each of them.

Reuben "Because the Lord has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." (Gen 29:32)

Simeon "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, he has therefore given me this son also." (Gen 29:33)

Levi "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have born him three sons." (Gen 29:34)

Judah "This time I will praise the Lord." (Gen 29:35)

Dan "God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." (Gen 30:6)

Napthali "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." (Gen 30:8)

Gad "How fortunate!" (Gen 30:11)

Asher "How happy am I! For women will call me happy." (Gen 30:13)

Issachar "God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband." (Gen 30:18)

Zebulun "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." (Gen 30:20)

Joseph "God has taken away my reproach." (Gen 30:23)

Benjamin "The son of my right hand." (Gen 35:18)

Finally, here is the scene and words for Manasseh, Joseph's first-born son, who was substituted for Dan:

Manasseh "For God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household." (Gen 41:51)

Now, if in place of the sons' names we substitute the soliloquies, and do so in the order that the names appear in Revelation 7, we get a startling prophetic message concerning the Israelites. First, I will give the rearranged soliloquy list, then the interpretation.

"This time I will praise the Lord because the Lord has seen my affliction. How fortunate, and happy am I! I have prevailed, and God has made me forget all my troubles and my father's household because the Lord has heard that I am unloved; He has therefore given me this son. Now this time my husband will become attached to me. God has given me my wages and God has endowed me with a good gift. God has taken away my reproach, the son of my right hand."

Now the interpretation, as applicable to the 144,000 in the Tribulation period:

"After 2000 years of rejecting God's Messiah, the sons of Israel are finally praising God, for He has seen and removed the affliction of His people. The sons of Israel are finding God restoring their fortunes and their happiness, and making them forget their troubles of the past 2000 years when they were unloved all around the world. God has given them the Son they rejected, Jesus,

and because of their newfound faith in Jesus as their Messiah, the Lord is again like a husband to them (see Isaiah 54:5). God has given these sons of Israel their wages, meaning they truly serve Him again. He has granted a good gift, eternal life, and He has taken away their reproach for their unbelief of the previous 2000 years by giving them God's own Son who sits at the right hand of God."

As for these sons of Israel, there's no question they serve God, since they are called "bond-servants" in Rev 7:3. As true believers in Jesus, they no doubt serve God by acting as missionaries to the entire world. Talk about making up for lost time! After 2000 years of the sons of Israel rejecting Jesus, they serve God by going boldly into all the world to tell everybody they can about Jesus. Someone has likened it to 144,000 "Billy Grahams" let loose on the world at once!

Someone may ask: if all the Christians have been Raptured out in the PreTrib Rapture, then how did these sons of Israel hear about Jesus? In answer to that, some have suggested that maybe they heard about Jesus through resources left behind by Christians, including old radio broadcasts, pamphlets, brochures, magazines, books, videos, CDs, DVDs, etc. While these all have possibilities, I believe there is a more direct source that reaches them: God's special agents, the Two Witnesses, about whom we will learn more in Revelation 11.

By the time we see the 144,000 in Revelation 7, the time span of the Tribulation period is past the halfway point. New supernatural plagues are yet to be unleashed upon a stubborn and unrepentant world. The angel with the seal of God will seal the foreheads of the 144,000 so that these choice and prized servants will be untouched by the plagues about to be poured out on the Earth. By this point, they will have served God exceedingly well, and He puts His seal on them.

As we saw in Rev 6:17, the frightened unbelievers cried out, "Who is able to stand?" In answer to that question, we have seen the 144,000. Next we see those they won to Christ.

"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Revelation 7:9-10).

When the sixth Seal was broken, the terrified unbelievers saw the throne in heaven and the wrath coming against them, and cried out, "Who is able to stand?" In Revelation chapter 7, we first saw the 144,000 in answer to that cry. Now we see God answering that question again by showing a great multitude "standing before the throne." Who is able to stand? Those who trust in Christ are "able to stand." This great multitude is not the Church, which was Raptured prior to the Tribulation, but are people from all over the world who responded to the preaching of the gospel by the 144,000 after the Rapture. They are from every nation, all tribes, peoples and languages. Being clothed in white robes, they are the souls of the slaughtered martyrs we saw from the fifth Seal, no longer gathered under the altar, but triumphantly gathered before God's throne. The martyrs had been told to be patient "until the number of their fellow servants and brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also" (Rev. 6:11). Moreover, the

fact they hold palm branches reminds us of Palm Sunday where people waved and laid down palm branches when Jesus rode as the prophesied Messiah into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey and the people shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 2:19).

As said before, once the Rapture snatches all Christians off the Earth prior to the Tribulation's seven years, the Lord's dealings return to Jewish ways. The palm branches are Messianic, distinctly Jewish in nature. Hence, the great multitude before the throne in Revelation are there having believed in Jesus as the Messiah in a Jewish messianic way of understanding Him. They cry out in a loud voice, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

While it does have the harp, a soothing and pleasant stringed instrument, Heaven is not a quiet place!

"And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'" (Revelation 7:11-12)

Those already in heaven joined the praise of that multitudinous crowd in exceeding great gladness in praising God for the salvation of so many souls! Years ago I attended an event in Washington, D.C., where Christian men filled the huge Washington Mall. While no exact head count was made by the event's promoters (to avoid the sin of Pride), estimates by others placed the attendance at about one million men. One thing I will never forget was when over the public address, an event speaker told the assembled men to call out the name of the church they attended. As you would expect, the resulting sound was confused as the names of hundreds, maybe thousands, of different churches were cried out. Then the speaker said, "Who do you serve?" With a single united voice, a million men shouted out, "Jesus Christ!" I can only imagine what it will be like when, not a million, but billions of voices in heaven cry out in a united voice the praise of almighty God!

"Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes'" (Revelation 7:13-17).

John is asked if he knows the identity of that great multitude. The Church is already there in heaven, as seen represented by the twenty-four elders, so it isn't the Church; if John suspects their identity, he doesn't voice it to the elder, for John himself was an elder of a church:

"The elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in truth..." (2 John 1a)

"The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth." (3 John 1)

John defers to the elder for the answer as to whom these people are, and that elder then tells him, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation." These souls are the ones murdered by the rampage the Antichrist embarked upon after the Abomination of Desolation (Dan 9:27).

Jesus also spoke of the Abomination of Desolation, saying:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains...for then shall be a great tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will be" (Matt. 24:15-16, 21).

A great many souls will not make it to safety, for the deadly rampage will not be limited to Judea in the modern Israel, but will be worldwide in scope. The great crowd shown here paid for their faith with their lives. Now, God promises them peace and comfort forever, never again to suffer anything ever again. They will be in a pure relationship with Him, the Lamb that was slain, who is their great Shepherd who will care for them, His lambs.

The great Father Almighty will tenderly wipe away every tear from their eyes. Even as God loves so many, yet He has time for the individual, and this care is seen in His personal touch to wipe away tears. As John wrote, "God is love" (1 John 1:8b).

He cares about me, and He cares about YOU, reader! Come to Him by faith In Jesus, and He'll take care of you forever.

Chapter Eight

"When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake. And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them" (Rev 8:1-6).

Such a dramatic moment! As we saw previously, heaven is not a quiet place. The four living creatures do not cease to cry "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Rev 4:8), and they speak with voices loud as thunder (Rev 6:1). The Raptured Church is there praising God (Rev 4:10). Countless angels praise Him (Rev 5:11-12). From God's throne, we know there are flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder, the demonstration of the awesome thundering, shaking power of God Almighty (Rev 4:5).

Now, after the Lord Jesus Christ opens the seventh seal, a deathly silence comes over heaven. There is no thunder, lightning and sounds. No one speaks. No one praises. No one says anything. This is the eerie and proverbial calm before the storm. By this point in time, the human race has had a great World War and its aftermath that killed a fourth of mankind. Men turned in vile rejection and hatred of God to follow Satan and his Antichrist, and murdered those who belonged to God. God responded with a cosmic disturbance so obvious as to leave no doubt in the minds of the unbelievers just Who is in charge, and they cried out in terror to the mountains to hide them. With the breaking of the seventh seal, the storm of God's retribution is about to fall. Trumpets have been used throughout history to make announcements of significance for kings and others in authority. Now seven trumpets are handed out in utter silence.

We saw during the fifth seal martyred souls under an altar before God. Now an angel stands at that very altar with a golden censer filled with a special incense. A censer is used to slowly burn incense to fill the air with its sweet smell. We were told in Rev 5:8 that the "prayers of the saints" are a sweet incense before God. The angel's censer is filled with these prayers. We must realize that prayers coming from God's redeemed ones are a sweet savor to Him. Much more incense is added to what's already there, and it all goes up before God. God hears prayers, and remembers them. They are stored up for fulfillment in the time and manner He deems fitting. When the angel has offered all this incense, then he fills the censer with fire from the altar. There is a solemnity to this. The smoke of the incense of His people's prayers are a sweet smoke. Now, the angel throws fire of a different kind, a devouring fire that creates smoke of, not sweetness like incense, but of doom and destruction.

To those living on earth in sinful pride and rebellion, a terrifying fire comes down out of heaven, which reminds us of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal in 2 Kings 19:17-40. As this fire from the angel's censer falls, there is lightning, thunder, sounds and an earthquake. If the eerie silence of half an hour is the calm before the storm, then this fire thrown to earth is akin to

the first heavy spattering drops of rain for a heavy earthly rainstorm just beginning to pour down on the earth.

"The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up" (Rev 8:7).

This trumpet heralds a judgment from God that brings to mind one of the plagues on Egypt:

"Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt.' Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation" (Exodus 9:22-24).

There are, however, two significant differences between the two judgment in Exodus and Revelation. First, the plague in Egypt was on Egypt alone, whereas the plague in Revelation falls on the entire planet, resulting in one-third of the earth and trees being burned up, and all green grass. Second, the plague in Revelation has a horror mixed in with it: blood! Since the hail is intermixed with fire, it may well be that the blood is hot, at the very temperature of blood in a human body. The unbelievers had, in the heat of their rage against God and His believers, spilled innocent hot human blood; now hot blood screaming their guilt is spilled on them!

"The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed" (Rev 8:8-9).

We need only look to the motion picture industry to see what the results of a colossal body striking the sea could be like. The film "Deep Impact," made with diligence to be scientifically accurate, showed a comet hitting the Atlantic Ocean, and how it created a tsunami hundreds of feet high, killing millions. Another film, "Armageddon," showed what a gigantic asteroid strike could do to devastate the Earth.

Here in Revelation, the Apostle John sees what looks like a "great mountain burning with fire" thrown into the sea. Certainly, in today's world with our scientific knowledge, we can understand how a massive asteroid would seem like a mountain "burning with fire" as it heats up and burns its way through the Earth's atmosphere. However, there is a supernatural element in this judgment that eclipses a merely normal and natural scientific explanation: blood! Once again, blood comes against the earth, so much so that a third of the sea became blood! This strike at the sea wipes out a third of all sea creatures and one third of all mankind's ships.

"The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and the springs of water. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter" (Rev 8:10-11).

Wormwood is a plant used medicinally for various treatments. It has a bitter taste, and its oil is extremely poisonous. When in the later 20th century a nuclear reactor Chernobyl blew, it scattered radioactivity across a great area of Europe. Bible students noted that Chernobyl, in the Ukrainian language, means wormwood. Whether this judgment is actually the bitter plant wormwood, which God could create, or a symbolic portrayal of some other great destructive agent such as radioactivity, there is no question as to its effects: many men died from the waters it affects. God's judgments continue to pour out on a rebellious mankind.

"The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way" (Rev 8:12).

At first glance, this judgment might seem to be a "so what?" OK, so the sun, moon and stars don't shine as much, so why is this judgment to be feared? After all, it doesn't seem to DO anything ominous like hail, fire and blood; turning a third of the sea to blood; and poisoning the drinking water. Yet with a second look, we remember that people and animals eat plants. Plants need light to achieve photosynthesis so they can grow. With a third of the light gone, mankind's food supply will be further diminished. Another thing to remember is that the Earth's weather is affected by the amount of light falling on the Earth, not only in the patterns of wind and rain, but also in temperature. Thirty-three percent less light spells catastrophic weather, including cold!

Yet another point to consider is the effect on human morale. So much more darkness will be an affliction to the hearts, minds and souls of those who dwell on the earth. That much darkness will be oppressive and disturbing, even fearful. Jesus warned of disturbed weather patterns during the Tribulation period:

"There will be signs in sun and moon and stars and on earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Luke 21:25-26).

It is no coincidence that these words of Jesus fit the trumpet judgments we have seen thus far. Yet, the judgments to come are worse still!

"Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'" (Rev 8:13).

The Apostle John next sees a messenger flying in midheaven. While the New American Standard Bible says an "eagle", other translations use the word "angel." This is not difficult to resolve as we look at one of the four living creatures in Rev 4:7 about whom it is said, "...and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle." In any case, the messenger flies through Earth's skies with a dire message: "Woe, woe, woe!" The next three trumpets which are the last three are so severe that the messenger's triple cry of "woe!" is exceedingly foreboding and ominous. It is as if he

were crying, "If you thought the first four trumpets were bad, then brace yourself for the next three!" Or, in the words of a popular saying, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

Chapter Nine

"The the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit" (Rev 9:1-2).

The first of the three woes is unleashed, and John sees a "star from heaven which had fallen to the earth." In Rev 1:1, John wrote that the Revelation of Jesus Christ was "signified," meaning it was communicated by means of signs and symbols which have literal meanings behind them. Here in Revelation 9, we know the "star" isn't an actual energetically glowing physical stellar sphere, such as fill the galaxies of space, and around which our own planet Earth orbits within our solar system. This star is a person, not a celestial object; it almost certainly is a fallen angel. To "him" was given the key of the bottomless pit, or abyss (Greek abussos, literally "depthless".) This key is a prison door key, and as we shall see in a moment, the abyss has dwelling inside it some terrifying things.

When the abyss is opened, smoke goes up out of the pit as though from a huge furnace. So much smoke goes out that the sun and the air are darkened. For the inhabitants of the earth, this opening might be seen as a volcanic eruption. When a volcano erupts, volcanic ash gets thrown high into the atmosphere and blocks the sun and air. What comes next from the abyss, however, would not be dwelling in any earthly volcano!

"Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man" (Rev 9:3-5).

Locusts come out of the smoke. While ordinarily we think of grasshopper-like insects, these locusts are not organic animal life forms at all. First, locusts would not--could not--live in an environment of intense dark smoke like from a great furnace. Second, human history has stories of locust swarms that come like a plague, eating essentially all green plant matter in the area. In contrast, these locust from the abyss are given orders not to hurt:

- 1) the grass of the earth
- 2) any green thing
- 3) any tree

This is contrary to the nature of natural locusts, which attack all three of the above. Moreover, what they ARE ordered to do, is to attack men. Even in this, they are limited to attacking men without God's seal, which we saw earlier in Rev 7:2-4. Further, these locusts apparently are powerful enough to kill human beings, for the passage says, "they were not permitted to kill anyone," which strongly implies they could if allowed to do so, but instead they are restrained from doing so. Another point of difference between natural locusts and these from the fifth

trumpet is scorpion-like tails which have the ability to sting men to cause unbearable torment. No natural locust has any such scorpion power.

This plague is awful! The torment the locusts inflict is terrible: "like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man."

"And in those days men shall seek death and will not find it; they will long to die and death flees from them" (Rev 9:6).

People do not die from the stings they receive, but they wish they could. The sting is so painful that men try to end their pain by suicide. When the passage says men shall "seek" death, the Greek for "seek" is *zeteo*, which in this verse's context means "to plot against life" or "endeavor" or "seek the means." People thus tormented are stuck with pain that is unbearable, but also inescapable, a pain that lingers for five months. They long to die, but death flees from them-- attempts to commit suicide do not work. A gun will perhaps not fire, or if it does, the bullet bounces off them. They throw themselves from tall buildings, but survive the fall without a scratch. Poison does not work. Knife blades do not cut. They truly try to die, but they cannot! They make every attempt, but all courses fail!

Why do these "locusts" do this for five months? Christian pastor and writer Warren Wiersbe in his study on Revelation, "Be Victorious," noted, "The normal lifespan of the locust is about five months (May to September), and this is the length of time that the judgment will last."

The horror of this "woe" is that it is a foretaste of the horror of being tormented in the final doom of the Lake of Fire, damned to torment day and night for all eternity, never able to escape it. Ever. The nature of the fifth trumpet locusts is further revealed:

"The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like teeth of lions. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle. They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months. They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon. The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things" (Rev 9:7-12).

If there were any lingering thoughts that these locusts are somehow natural, perhaps a mutation, the rest of the description should remove all doubt. These locusts are unnatural and virtually incomprehensible. They are not of the animal kingdom, nor are they machines like helicopters or some fantastic war machine made by man, for nothing in nature nor any device of man can supernaturally keep men from successfully completing their frenzied and desperate suicide attempts. No, this is the judgment of God!

We are told in the Word of God, "the locusts have no king" (Proverbs 30:27). Yet, these "woe" locusts have a king called Abaddon (in Hebrew) and Apollyon (in Greek). Both names mean "destroyer." It is likely that this locust king, the Destroyer, is the same as the "star from heaven

which had fallen to the earth" we saw in verse 1, and therefore, the locusts of this "woe" are demons who were too terrible to be allowed to run loose on the Earth, but had been locked away in the abyss to await a time they would be used by God to judge wicked men on Earth. The fact these locusts are "not permitted to kill anyone" hints to the possibility that they were murderous, and hence were locked away as being too dangerous to be allowed freedom.

The book of Job tells us of how the angels, both good and fallen, assembled before God (Job 1:6). Twice Satan insulted God before all heaven (Job 1:10-11; 2:4-5). Twice God allowed Satan to afflict Job, but both times His permission limited what Satan could do to Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).

These demonic "woe" locusts are not permitted to kill anyone, nor to afflict anyone with God's seal; other than that, they could torment men to their heart's delight. When the five months have elapsed, we are told, "the first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things." What could be worse than this terrible torment? Let's find out.

"Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates'" (Rev 9:13-14).

As terrible as the demonic locusts were, something worse is about to be unleashed. We saw the locusts were locked away in the abyss. Now we are told of four angels who have been locked up at the Euphrates River. The fact that they have been in bonds there shows they are evil fallen angels. Again, we get the hint that these four were too terrible to be allowed freedom on Earth. Now, they are being loosed.

In the letter of Jude, we find reference to terrible fallen angels locked away:

"And angels who did not keep own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6).

Peter also refers to them:

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4).

It isn't clear whether the angels about whom Peter and Jude wrote are these very same four angels bound at the Euphrates, or the demonic locusts from the abyss, or are separate ones who do not get released until Judgment Day itself. Whatever the case, we turn our attention to the terrible role to be played by the "Euphrates Four."

"And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them; the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and sulfur and brimstone. A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of there mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their

tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm" (Rev 9:15-19).

In Revelation 6, we saw a fourth of the Earth's population dying as a result of the combination of war, famine, pestilence, and attacks of wild animals. Now the death toll rises to one-third more. The four angels apparently have a vast army of 200,000,000 -- John tells us he heard that specific number. Whether these armies of the four angels are human or otherwise, is hard to determine, for their description, like that of the locusts, is nearly incomprehensible. Those living on the Earth at the time it happens will understand, much to their sorrow and terror.

It has been known since the beginning of Man that the most painful wound a human being can suffer is a burn. These 200,000,000 inflict death by fire, smoke and brimstone, the very elements comprising the final doom, the Lake of Fire (Rev 14:10; 20:14). How terrible, and yet fitting, that the death that wicked men suffer at the hands of the Euphrates Four and the 200,000,000 is a death by fire and brimstone that ends their mortal lives, only to propel them into the eternal state where they will be doomed to suffer fire and brimstone for all eternity!

"The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts" (Rev 9:20-21).

In spite of the terrible death toll, and in spite of the knowledge that God is behind these judgments, mankind does not repent! They trust in false gods of gold, silver, etc., even though they saw the wrath of God on the throne and Jesus the Lamb when the sky was ripped open (Rev 6:15-17). Incredible! How deep does the stain of sin go? All the way, soul-deep.

Knowing all this, they continue in their sins of murder, sorcery, immorality and theft. It seems likely that these four sins are mentioned particularly, because they represent the most predominant sins being then committed by the human race at large. We saw the murder of all the martyrs in the fifth seal. As for "sorceries," the word bears some interesting examination. It is translated from the Greek *pharmakeia*, from which we get the word "pharmacy," meaning drugs or medication. Those practicing sorcery or magic often use drugs to help them connect with the spirit world. In context of today's world, "sorceries" has not only the idea of practicing the occult, but also of drug abuse and addiction. The use of "recreational" drugs in the world today is occurring everywhere. What many drug users may not realize is that taking drugs can not only give a "high," but it may well also open an unsuspected and unwanted door to the realm of the occult and demonic bondage.

Friend, if upon reading this description of the coming judgments of God, you find yourself uncertain whether you will escape these terrors and the doom of eternity in the Lake of Fire, then know that God still extends to you an offer of a complete and total pardon, and forgiveness of your sins. It is not too late for you, no matter how badly or deeply you have sinned.

Our sins, as a point of fact, deserve death ("the wages of sin is death" Rom 6:23).

God knew this, and so He sent His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life without committing any sin. Then, He willingly went to the cross and submitted Himself as a substitute for you and me, to bear the cost and penalty that our sins deserved. That is why Jesus died on the cross. He took the beating we should have gotten. He died the death we deserved. The punishment we had coming to us, He took for us.

After burial in the grave for 3 days, He rose from the dead in what is called the resurrection. His rising from the dead was proof that the price of the punishment for our sins was paid for, and that payment was accepted by God. Now God is free to offer a complete pardon to us based on Jesus Christ's sacrifice of Himself on our behalf.

If you place your faith in Jesus, and that He died for your sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day, then you will gain His forgiveness and an eternal place in heaven, and will never see Hell.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

If you want to avoid the demonic locusts that sting and make you want to die but cannot, or those four Euphrates angels and their 200,000,000 that kill with fire and brimstone, or the even the earlier world war that kills one-fourth of the world, or the crash of the asteroid into the seas, or the Wormwood that poisons the drinking water, or any of these judgments, now is your chance! God is offering you, right now, a gift of forgiveness for your sins and eternal life.

Reach out and receive it now!

Chapter Ten

"And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land; and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices. When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them.'"
(Revelation 10:1-4)

Angels are the servants of God. They are messengers, such as Gabriel bringing to Daniel knowledge of the future (Daniel 8:16; 9:21) and also news to Mary of the virgin conception of Jesus (Luke 1:26-27). Angels are also ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14). They are mightier than men (2 Peter 2:11), and are majestic (2 Peter 2:10; Jude 8). Even so, they are not to be worshipped (Col 2:18; Rev 22:8-9).

Throughout his vision, John has seen many angels. Now he sees another one, a strong one, coming down out of heaven. Its size and power dwarf our concepts and stagger our imagination about what an angel is like. This one is clothed in a cloud. Clouds are immense! They are hundreds, if not thousands, of feet thick from top to bottom, and can span miles across. Yet, this mighty angel wears one, meaning he is sheerly colossal and larger than even this cloud!

John sees the rainbow upon the angels' head. We know the rainbow was given by God to Noah after the Flood as a sign that He would never again judge the people and creatures of the earth by water.

"God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; I will set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and the earth. It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, and I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and never again shall the water become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.'" (Genesis 9:12-16)

By this point in Revelation chapter 10, John has seen many judgments of God upon the earth, but none of them have involved a flood. God is true, though every man were a liar (Rom 3:4). The occurrence of both a cloud and a rainbow with this strong angel is a remembrance of God's eternal pledge to never again destroy all life on earth by a flood. He is faithful, and keeps His promises.

This strong angel, in addition to his immense size and strength, has a face that shines like the sun. He blazes with purity and power. When an angel attended the resurrection of Jesus, the Scripture says, "And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow" (Matt 28:3). Luke additionally tells us the angel's clothing was dazzling (Luke 24:4). Both pictures, the

sun and lighting, are indicative of tremendous power! Peter tells us of sinful men who do not tremble before angelic majesties, saying, "...those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord" (2 Peter 2:10-11). As great as is this angel on Revelation 10 in having great power and beauty and light, the fallen angel Lucifer was even more dazzling and beautiful (Ezekiel 28:12-17). Yet, compared to the Creator, they are mere shadows of the glory that is God!

The dazzling clothing, white as snow (Matt 28:3; Luke 24:4), is not unlike the cloud worn by the angel of Rev 10. When you ride in an aircraft over the clouds during the day, you can see the clouds, dazzling in their whiteness and brightness. The strong angel has feet like pillars of fire. Both the cloud the strong angel wears, and his feet like pillars of fire, remind us of God's presence among the children of Israel during their Exodus from Egypt.

"The Lord was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light. that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people" (Exodus 13:21-22).

As we saw earlier in Revelation, once the Church is Raptured, everything in Revelation has a distinctly Jewish flavor and feel to it. So it is here also that the strong angel of Rev 10 gives reminders to the modern children of Israel, who will go through the seven years of the Seventieth Week of Daniel (aka the Tribulation, or "the time of Jacob's trouble"), that the God of their fathers is still very much with them, and has not forsaken them, neither does He sleep nor slumber, nor has He forgotten His promises, nor lost His power, strength, majesty and wisdom. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God, eternal, majestic and almighty! (Ps 90:2).

The strong angel has in his hand a little book. He places one foot, like a pillar of fire, on the sea; the other also like a pillar of fire, on the land. Given the pillar of fire as an indicator of God's presence to the children of Israel during the Exodus, the feet on both the land and the sea represents God's presence is over all the Earth. The angel cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. It has been said that when a lion roars out on the savannah in Africa, its roar can be heard as far as five miles away. So, too, the voice of the strong angel carries far and wide.

His call is answered by the seven peals of thunder. This is the one place in Revelation where God does NOT reveal, but keeps it secret, for John is forbidden to write down what they said. People have tried to speculate what was said, but the truth is that...we...don't...know! I don't know what they said either, but I suspect the reason *why* we weren't allowed to know, is that the information might have been about things that we, who live so close to the time of the Rapture and Tribulation, would recognize, if we were to know it. For instance, the common everyday terms "computer" and "telephone" would have been utterly mysterious to 1st century people, but to 21st century people, they are well known. Whatever God's reasons, the message of the seven peals of thunder won't be known until the Rapture has happened and the Tribulation is finally underway, and current events have caught up to prophesied events.

"The the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets" (Rev 10:5-7).

The strong angel swears an oath, indicated by raising his right hand, a thing we do even today in courts to bind someone to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The angel's oath is sworn by God, specifically by His eternal existence and by His having created everything. The oath affirms the truth "that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished."

So far we have seen seven Seals. The seventh Seal brought forth seven Trumpets. Now, when the seventh Trumpet in its turn sounds, it will (as we shall see later in Rev 11:15) bring forth the seven Bowls of wrath, which start in Rev 16:1. The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are "telescoping." By this we mean, the seven Trumpets do not merely follow the seventh Seal--they are contained within the seventh Seal. Likewise, the seven Bowls do not merely follow the seventh Trumpet--they are contained within the seventh Trumpet. In speaking of events just preceding the Second Coming (not the Rapture) described in Rev 19:11-21, Jesus said: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matt 24:29).

We have already seen that the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light (i.e. turning blood red, as in a total lunar eclipse), and the stars falling from the sky, happens in the sixth Seal (Rev 6:12-17). The phrase "the powers of the heavens will be shaken" refers to the Trumpets and Bowls judgments that follow by means of the Seventh Seal. The seven Bowls are contained in the seventh Trumpet, and in turn the seven Trumpets are contained in the seventh Seal. So, when the sixth Seal affects the sun, moon and stars, the seventh Seal "shakes" the heavens through the Trumpets and Bowls judgments it contains.

The strong angel swears "...the mystery of God is finished." What is "the mystery of God?" The word "mystery" is from the Greek "musterion," which according to Strong's means a secret or "mystery" (through the idea of silence imposed by initiation into religious rites.) As used in the Bible, a mystery is a secret that only "insiders" (i.e. those initiated) may know. Jesus spoke truths wrapped in parables. His disciples asked Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He answered, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted" (Matt 13:11). Also, in Mark 4:11, Jesus told them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outsiders get everything in parables."

God's plans for His ultimate kingdom were planned in eternity past, and they all revolved around Jesus Christ. God has a colossal plan, grand beyond all human designs, a plan encompassing redemption and glorification beyond our wildest dreams. When the text in Rev 10:7 says that the

mystery of God is "finished," it is not so much the idea of just ending, as in stopping, but of completion and fulfillment, as of the last piece of the puzzle falling into place.

So, when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, thereby unleashing the seven Bowls, at the end of the seventh Bowl, Jesus Christ returns in the Second Coming (Rev 19:11) to take away control of Earth, and to set up God's kingdom, starting with the Millennial Kingdom to fulfill promises made to the children of Israel, and then finally the Eternal Kingdom.

The "mystery of God" is deep and rich, and the fullest understanding of it comes from the Apostle Paul. It is revealed in God's plans for the Church in its relationship to Christ. In the days of the patriarchs and the children of Israel, Gentiles were outsiders (Ephesians 2:11-12), without God and without hope. A Gentile could become a proselyte (Acts 2:10), whereby he converted to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. However, proselytes were "third-class" citizens. Jewish men were first, then Jewish women, and then proselytes. God's plan, His great mystery, was that He would make converted Gentiles full members in Christ's body, the Church, on an equal footing with Jews, a thing previously unthinkable to the Israelites.

Paul wrote of this full equality:

"That by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:3-6).

Peter was astonished when the Gentile Roman centurion Cornelius and his household were saved, and then received the Holy Spirit, in exactly the same way the Jews had experienced on Pentecost (Acts 10:1-48).

Another aspect of "the mystery of God" is the indwelling presence of Christ in every believer by the Holy Spirit:

"That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:26-27).

This mystery of the indwelling presence of Christ within each believer is so critical, that the lack of it means a person does not belong to Him, meaning, that person is not saved and does not have eternal life (i.e. is "in the flesh"):

"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom 8:9).

Still another aspect of God's mystery is the totality of the wealth of wisdom and knowledge in Christ Himself. Paul wrote of his hope for believers "that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of

understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3).

The completion of the mystery of God and His kingdom through Christ and the resurrection of believers is summarized by Paul:

"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death, for He has put all things in subjection under His feet. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:22-28).

Thus we see that when the seventh Trumpet angel blows, the last of the judgments (the seven Bowls) are unleashed; Christ returns and begins the process of subjecting all things to the Father. It is toward this glorious end that Paul also wrote of the contrast between our current suffering and our future resurrection:

"For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will also be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves having the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:18-23).

All of history has been leading up to this point. So, when the strong angel swears that oath concerning the completion of the mystery of God, it is awesome in its manifold meanings! We can almost hear the very creation itself catch its breath in anticipation of the coming of the promised relief from corruption and the revealing of the children of God (Rom 8:21). The prophets of God revealed it, and by the point in time of the angel's oath, it will have almost arrived!

"Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, 'Go take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.' So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, 'Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.' I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings'" (Rev 10:8-11).

John is instructed to eat a little book, which is a message of prophecy. That word would be sweet in his mouth. as sweet as honey. This means it was a joy and blessing to speak God's Word.

However, the message was a message of woe, so it made him feel its bitterness inside him -- it made him sick that such a word was needed to be spoken. They told John, "You must prophesy again..." The Greek for "again" in this passage is "palin", which per Strong's carries the idea of oscillatory repetition. John is NOT being told that he must resume prophesying, as in picking up where he left off. Rather, the Greek "palin" brings to mind in this context the picture of a pendulum swinging; it started from one point, reached as far as it goes, and has now swung back to its starting point.

Therefore, when John is instructed to eat the little book and prophesy again (Greek "palin"), he is being told to go back like a pendulum to the beginning of the Tribulation period, at its very start, for the giving of the prophecy that immediately follows in Revelation chapter 11. Hence, Rev 11:1 starts on DAY 1 of the seven years of the Tribulation period, aka Daniel's Seventieth week.

Chapter Eleven

"Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, 'Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.'" (Rev 11:1).

As seen in Rev 10:11, John was told he must prophecy "again," and we saw that this is the Greek word "palin" signifying a return back in place or time through the idea of oscillatory repetition, like the swing of a pendulum returning to the beginning point of its swing. God exists omnipresently not only in every place, but in every time, equally before, throughout, and after Time itself. He brought John in vision to some 2,000 years or so in his future to our time, and now the Lord backs up John in time in the vision to the start of the seven years of the 70th Week. Therefore, Rev 11:1 returns us back to the beginning of the 70th Week (i.e. the seven years long Tribulation period), back to "Day 1."

Here at the beginning of the 70th Week, John receives a measuring rod and a command to measure "the temple of God," "the altar," and "those who worship in it." By this we can see several things.

First, that there will in our day another temple built for Jewish worship.

Second, that it will be built in Judea, in Jerusalem itself, for there was no other place authorized by God in the Old Testament for where the sons of Israel were to build their temple.

Third, it will be fully built, for you cannot hand a measuring rod to someone to measure something that is not built yet; therefore, the instruction implies he is being ordered to measure a completed item, not something under construction.

Fourth, by the fact John is to measure "the altar," it shows that the construction is not only finished, but that the temple and altar have been consecrated to God in order to offer sacrifices.

Fifth, the order to measure "those who worship in it" shows not only that the temple is finished and consecrated, but also that it is already in use by the time the very first day of the Tribulation has begun; sacrifices will already be getting offered according to the Levitical priesthood system (for Israel would certainly not use any other system.)

At first it would seem instructive for Christians today to keep an eye out on current world events for any sign that construction has started on a new temple. However, because of the Rapture, Christians might well not still be on earth when that construction begins. For years I have heard reports that plans for a new temple already exist, and that the stones to be used in its construction are already pre-cut and are presently stored in warehouses awaiting the "go-ahead" signal. As of the time of this writing, an organization in Israel has been for years preparing modern Israelis for Levitical priesthood service. Linen garments of the priests are already made, as are silver and gold implements to be used in temple worship. Moreover, they have already begun gathering natural loose stones to build the temple altar in accordance with the Divine command:

"If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stone, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it." (Exodus 20:25).

The emphasis on not using tools on the stones is to remind us that salvation is provided by what God has done, not by what man has done. Natural loose stones are God's handiwork; cut stones are man's. Salvation is of the Lord.

While we do not know the exact time of when the Rapture and subsequent Tribulation period will occur, events like these nonetheless surely point to the fact the Church Age is rapidly drawing near to its conclusion. Both the Rapture and the Tribulation period are inexorably approaching with each passing day, and they are much closer in time to us than many of us would believe.

The point of mentioning the preparations being made in advance by modern Israelis for resuming temple service and worship, is that once the "go-ahead" is finally given, the temple could be built in a surprisingly short amount of time, seemingly almost overnight. While I believe the Tribulation starts immediately on the heels of the Rapture, the Scriptures do not explicitly tell how much time elapses between the Pre-Trib Rapture and the start of the Trib period. To add to the problem is that many well-meaning and sincere Christians believe that the Rapture is not Pre-Trib (i.e. prior to the seven years of the Tribulation period, also called the 70th week of Daniel); instead, many believe it occurs some time within the 7-year period (i.e. the Mid-Trib Rapture and the Pre-Wrath Rapture viewpoints), or at its conclusion (i.e. the Post-Trib Rapture viewpoint.) As we go further into Revelation, however, additional evidence will emerge to show why the Rapture is indeed Pre-Trib. Stay tuned!

Even though I have stated it is my belief the Tribulation immediately follows the Rapture, to be fair, a case for a gap of a few weeks between the Rapture and the Tribulation could possibly be based on Revelation chapter 4 and 5. As shown earlier, the Rapture occurs in Rev 4:1. After the vision of God the Father on the throne in chapter 4, we see the scroll in His hand in chapter 5, and that a search is made throughout all creation to find someone worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. Some argument might possibly be made for a few weeks interval occurring on Earth between the Rapture in Rev 4:1 and the start of the Tribulation period in Rev 6:1 while that desperate search is made throughout all creation.

However, there is no way to assess how much time on Earth this might take, if indeed any time at all, for remember that the scenes in heaven are occurring in eternity outside of time. We do know for certain that the progression of seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowls found between Rev 6:1 and Rev 19:1 span across seven Hebrew lunar years of 360 days each; however, unless the Divine text tells us how much time any other particular event takes, we are left only with guesses about the passage of time for any given event described for us. Nothing is given for how long it takes for the search made throughout the creation for someone who is worthy, so any guess is just that -- a guess.

The long and the short of it is this: Rev 11:1 clearly shows the new temple will be built and in use on Day 1 of the seven year Tribulation period. Whether Christians will see it being built and

put into use will be dependant on whether the Tribulation immediately follows the Rapture, or whether a time gap exists between the two.

"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months" (Rev 11:2).

In modern Israel, much contention exists between the followers of Islam and the sons of Israel. In Jerusalem (as of this writing), there has been the Muslim shrine, the Dome of the Rock, sitting not far from the remains of the old temple, of which the Wailing Wall is the most prominent temple portion accessible to modern Israelis. For decades, scholars have debated on just how the new temple was going to be built with the Dome of the Rock "in the way", so to speak, and have wondered whether something (perhaps an earthquake?) would need to happen to remove the Dome of the Rock in order to build a new temple for the Jewish religion.

Newer archaeological research, however, has discovered that the Dome sits, not on the site of the old temple as was previously thought, but in the outer court of the temple, a place reserved for Gentile proselytes (i.e. converts.) This discovery meant that a new Jewish temple could at least theoretically be built adjacent to the Muslim Dome of the Rock. This might well be the meaning of the instruction to John in verse 2, "leave out the court which is outside the temple...for it has been given to the nations." This instruction also would imply, when compared with the "Abomination of Desolation" (which we will look at in detail later), that the operation of the temple applies only for the first 42 months (meaning the first half) of the 70th Week. Why? Because the latter part of verse 2 tells us that the nations will profane by treading under foot all of Jerusalem (including the temple courts) for 42 months (meaning the second half) of the 70th Week.

"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth" (Rev 11:3-4).

In Rev 10:11, where John was told he must prophesy "again" (Greek "palin"), we saw that meant to go back to the start of the seven years. So, in this chapter we get to see (in verse 1) not only a new temple already in operation in Israel on "Day 1" of the seven year Tribulation period, we also now see (in verse 3) God's Two Witnesses making their appearance on that very same "Day 1". They have been granted authority by Jesus Christ. How do we know that? By comparing Scripture with Scripture:

Jesus told His disciples:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Jesus charged the Church to be His witnesses; however, once the Church has been Raptured away, they can no longer do that job, so He authorizes these Two Witnesses to be "my two

witnesses." They prophesy for 1260 days, which is 42 lunar months of 30 days each. This is not only exactly half of the Tribulation period, but it is specifically the first half.

Oh, how different life on planet Earth will be once the Rapture occurs and the seven years of Daniel's 70th Week begin! In the Rapture, first an uncountable number of graves will be emptied as the dead in Christ are resurrected. Then, hundreds of millions of people, perhaps as many as a billion, will vanish off the face of the Earth in the blink of an eye (1 Thes 4:15-18; 1 Cor 15:51-58).

Chaos on a never-before-seen scale will ensue on our planet in the aftermath of such a massive disappearance. Then, as the Tribulation starts, Two Witnesses from God, clad in the solemn and mournful attire of sackcloth, begin prophesying for a ministry period of exactly 1260 days, not one day more, nor one day less. At the same time, Satan's "man of the hour", the Antichrist, will rise meteorically to the attention of everyone the world over, and have attesting signs and lying wonders as his credentials (2 Thes 2:9-10).

People will have two conflicting sources of information on what happened in the Rapture and what to do next. On one hand, people will be dazzled by the Antichrist as he offers both Satan's explanation for the Rapture and Satan's course of action they need to take. On the other hand, the whole world will quickly get to know of the Two Witnesses who offer God's explanation of the Rapture, and God's course of action they need to take.

While the Antichrist's message will be diabolically plotted to turn men's eyes away from God to the worship of Satan, the Two Witnesses' message will be heavenly designed to turn men's heart to God by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The place the Two Witnesses minister is Jerusalem, as shown by the reference to the temple (in verses 1-2), and by their demise later in the streets of Jerusalem (in verse 8.)

The first converts to Jesus Christ after the Rapture are, I believe, the 144,000 sons of Israel we saw in Rev 7:4-8. They get so convicted by the testimony of these Two Witnesses that they come to faith in Jesus with a very great repentance. They are smitten in their hearts that Israel has rejected Jesus as their Messiah for some 2,000 years, and want to make up for lost time. They rush out into the world as zeal-filled evangelists to tell people everywhere in Earth about Jesus Christ. (Rev 7:3 calls them "bond-servants.")

As pointed out before in this writing, once the Rapture happens in Rev 4:1, everything in Revelation takes on a Jewish flavor, nature and style. Here in Rev 11:4, the readers of Revelation are again given a Jewish connection so they understand who these Two Witnesses are. In an ancient prophecy, an angel is speaking with the prophet Zechariah about an occurring vision.

"Then I said to him, 'What are these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?' And I answered the second time and said to him, 'What are the two olive branches which are beside the two golden pipes, which empty the golden oil from themselves?' So he answered me, 'Do you not know what these are?' And I said, 'No, my lord.' Then he said, 'These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.'" (Zechariah 4:11-14).

The wording in Rev 11:4 makes a Jewish connection that modern day Israelis will understand. These Two Witnesses are those very same anointed ones promised in Zechariah's prophecy of so long ago. This carries a VERY strong implication that their testimony is authenticated by the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Therefore, it is imperative that the modern Israelites listen to their message! But, who, exactly, ARE these Two Witnesses? Let's look at the following to find out.

"And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters, to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire" (Rev 11:5-6).

The two Witnesses are both protected by miracles, and also can perform miracles "as often as they desire." The fire that protects them calls to mind the prophet Elijah. An evil king sent soldiers to take Elijah the Prophet prisoner.

"Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on top of the hill. And he said to him, 'O man of God, the king says, "Come down."' Elijah replied to the captain of the fifty, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.' Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty" (2 Kings 1:9-10).

This happened a second time with the same results. A third captain came with his fifty and begged for his life, and was spared. The Two Witnesses are protected by fire which "devours their enemies." Another miracle pointing to Elijah is that they "have power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying." The "days of their prophesying" are, we are told in verse 2, twelve hundred and sixty (1260) days, which is three years and six months. James comments on Elijah's shutting off the rain:

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5:17-18).

Finally, that one of the Two Witnesses is Elijah is confirmed by a prophecy in the Old Testament.

"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6).

John the Baptist was a spiritual type of Elijah, and Jesus applied the role of Elijah to him when He said:

"And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come" (Matthew 11:14).

Yet, there was still a future coming of Elijah, even though the role of Elijah was metaphorically applied to John the Baptist:

"And His disciples asked Him, 'Why then do the scribes say the Elijah must come first?' And he answered and said, 'Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wish'" (Matthew 17:10-11a).

So, then, by the evidence of the miracles done like those of Elijah, and by the prophetic promise Elijah is yet to come, we see that one of the Two Witnesses is not merely someone coming in the spirit and role of Elijah, like John the Baptist, but it is actually Elijah himself.

Another thought on Elijah: he never died, for he had been taken alive to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). Later, this same Elijah (along with Moses) met with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36).

Scripture says: "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). So, it would seem that Elijah will return, only to die, which we shall see shortly.

Now, if Elijah is one of the Two Witnesses, who is the other? Judging by the miracles that "they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague," the evidence points to the other Witness as being Moses himself, for it was during Moses' ministry that water was turned to blood (Exodus 7:17-21) and plagues were smiting Egypt (ten plagues in all, the last being the death of all the firstborn in Egypt). Then, too, Moses (along with Elijah) met Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. We have found in the 4th chapter of Malachi the prophecy of the promise that Elijah would come. That entire chapter is about the events of the Tribulation period, so it is of particular interest that in the verse just before the promise of Elijah, the Lord tells Israel:

"Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel" (Malachi 4:4).

In Malachi chapter four, in the context of the End-Times of the 70th Week, God's mind is very much on both Moses and Elijah. Despite this evidence, many have doubted it could be Moses because he died before entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34:4-5). The verse cited earlier, Hebrews 9:27, which tells us "it is appointed for men to die once," becomes a stumbling block for some because it would mean to them that Moses would have to die twice, something seemingly contrary to that verse. Yet, that verse does not say, "It is appointed for men to die ONLY once." In the Bible there were, in fact, a number of people who had died, but were raised from the dead.

Elijah raised a boy in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

Elisha raised a child in 2 Kings 4:32-36, and in his death a man was also raised in 2 Kings 13:20-21.

Jesus raised the son of a widow in Nain in Luke 7:12-15, and Jairus' daughter in Luke 8:40-42, 49-56.

Peter raised Tabitha, also called Dorcas, in Acts 9:36-42.

Paul raised a young man, Eutychus, in Acts 20:7-12. (Eutychus, by the way, was well-named, for his name means "well-fated" or "fortunate." He was fortunate, indeed, because though he fell to his death, the Apostle Paul was there to raise him back to life again.)

It's important to note that though these people were raised from the dead, they all eventually died again, meaning a second time. Tabitha and Eutychus are in the Lord's presence right now--they died again. Jairus' daughter, though she died of a fever and Jesus raised her up, eventually died once again. With the "no-second-death" objection answered, some people still object to the raising of Moses, saying something like, "Well, each of those people was freshly dead, and decay had not yet set in, but Moses has already thoroughly decayed into dust." This objection, to my mind, sounds like the enemy Arameans who belittled the God of Israel. A man of God came to correct the Arameans' slander about the Lord:

"Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, 'Thus says the Lord, 'Because the Arameans have said, 'The LORD is a god of the mountains, but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand and you shall know that I am the LORD.'"" (1 Kings 20:28).

Are we going to be like the Arameans in that we find ourselves saying that the Lord is the God who can bring someone back to life if decay has not happened, but He is not the God who can raise someone once decay has set in? Yes, Moses' body has turned to dust through decay, but what is that to the Lord, "who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist" (Rom 4:17b)? We saw a moment ago the Scriptures telling of people who died, and were brought back to life. The objection raised against the revival of Moses is that these raisings from the dead happened before decay had set in. To answer this second objection, let us look at one other example of someone who had died, Lazarus, brother to Mary and Martha. Word had been sent to Jesus that Lazarus was sick (John 11:1-3), but Jesus deliberately waited, because He wanted to glorify His Father with a miracle (John 11:6-16). Finally, Jesus went to Lazarus.

"So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days" (John 11:17).

Then, after conversing with Lazarus' heartbroken sisters Mary and Martha, Jesus went to Lazarus' tomb in a cave which had a stone lying across the entrance.

"Jesus said, 'Remove the stone.' Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, 'Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days'" (John 11:39).

Martha's hopes had been that, if Jesus would only have come when she and her sister Mary had first sent word when her brother had been still alive, Lazarus could have been healed; or, if Jesus had come when Lazarus first died, he could have been raised. But, now, decay had set in. In Martha's mind, it was over. Her hopes were gone. She and her sister Mary loved Jesus as their friend and Lord, but what could even He do now that it was too late? "There will be a stench." Lazarus had decayed.

"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So, they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have

heard Me. I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.' When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth.' The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.' Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him." (John 11:40-45).

John the Baptist told the crowds, "for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham." (Luke 3:8b). Should we not understand that if God can raise children from the stones, that He can effortlessly raise Moses from the dust of decay? Yes, it will be that the decay of Moses' body will be undone, for the Lord Jesus will raise him up to become the other of the Two Witnesses. Nothing is too difficult for God!

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies'" (John 11:25).

The ministry of the Two Witnesses gives testimony to Jesus Christ, meaning, the Messiah. Remember that Rev 4:1 and so on is Jewish in nature? To the minds of the sons of Israel, "the Law and the Prophets" are the two spiritual authorities they recognize and accept.

Listen to the voice of the Scriptures as we explore "the Law and the Prophets."

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." (Matthew 5:17).

"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12)

"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'" (Luke 16:29).

"Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures." (Luke 24:27).

"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.'" (Luke 24:44).

After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" (Acts 13:15).

When the Two Witnesses come forth to testify concerning Jesus as the Messiah, they not only are bringing forth the testimony of the Law and the Prophets, as represented by Moses and Elijah, the Two Witnesses ARE Moses and Elijah! These two, who stood on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, now stand before all Israel testifying of Jesus Christ. How powerful

their testimony will be to the sons of Israel living in our modern world! Is it any wonder that the 144,000 repent and believe in Jesus as their Messiah, and in their zeal, they go out to share the gospel to all the nations?

The rest of the world, however, will be less than pleased with the Two Witnesses. Many in the world will be enamored of Satan's Antichrist, and will grow to resent, then hate, the message of the Two Witnesses, and will decide "to do something about it", meaning to try to harm or kill them. This is certainly implied in verse 5 where it twice says, "and if anyone wants to harm them...so if anyone wants to harm them..."

The people of the world won't merely hate the Two Witnesses because of their message, but will also hate them because of the miracles wherein the Witnesses "shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall," and "turn waters into blood," and also "strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire." These anointed servants of God Most High are calling a sinful world to repentance, but that world will be growing ever hardened in their hearts against the Two Witnesses, their testimony, and the Messiah, Jesus, whom they serve.

"When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. Those from the people and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because the two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." (Rev 11:7-10).

When the 1260 days of the testimony of the Two Witnesses is finished, the Antichrist goes out to kill them. It refers to him as "the beast that comes up out of the abyss." From the plague of stinging locusts in Rev 9, we have already seen that the "abyss" is a dwelling place of demons. In saying the beast comes up out of the abyss, many scholars believe the Antichrist will be utterly possessed by the Devil, a Satanic counterfeit and counterpart of the Incarnation wherein God the Son came to Earth in the mortal body of a man, being born at Bethlehem, as the prophet Micah foretold:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." (Micah 5:2).

Jesus Christ is literally Yahweh God clothed in a human body! This is the meaning of "Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), or "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Concerning the possession of the Antichrist and how Satan tries to counterfeit and imitate the Holy Trinity, we will see more detail in Revelation chapter 13. In the meanwhile, an important lesson to remember about the seven years of the 70th Week of Daniel 9:27 (i.e. the Tribulation period), is that it is divided into two 3-1/2 year-long equal halves, each being 42 months (1260

days) long, not one day shorter or longer. One of the key events of the entire seven years is the middle point, for it is then that the infamous "Abomination of Desolation" occurs.

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27).

Jesus referred to this event when He issued a warning about that time:

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet..." (Matthew 24:15a).

In the beginning of this chapter we saw that a new temple would already be built and in use on Day 1 of the 70th Week. We also saw the temple will be in operation for only the first 42 months (i.e. 1260 days, or 3-1/2 years.) of that seven-year 70th Week.. The reason for this is that, when the Abomination of Desolation is committed by the Antichrist in the middle of the 70th Week, he "will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering" (Dan 9:27). This means the ongoing temple sacrifices will be forcibly stopped. For the following 42 months (i.e. 1260 days, or 3-1/2 years.), meaning during the second half of the 70th Week, the nations will tread the holy city, Jerusalem, and the temple, under foot (Rev 11:2), thereby profaning it. Indeed, as we shall see in more detail in Revelation 13, the whole time of the second 42 months (i.e. the second half of the Tribulation period "Week") will be completely dominated by the Antichrist.

Now, after the 1260 days of the ministry of the Two Witnesses is finished, the time will be the middle of the Tribulation period, and hence time for the Antichrist to do (as described in Dan 9:27 above) his Abomination of Desolation, thereby profaning the Jewish temple and defying the true God by declaring himself to be God:

"who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god and object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of god, displaying himself as being God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Having proclaimed his own deity, he will emerge from the temple to confront the Two Witnesses, and will make war with them, and overcome them, and kill them (Revelation 11:7).

The rest of the world, who have been dazzled and enamored of him, will rejoice. At last! Those Two Witnesses, whom they had grown to hate, were dead! Their bodies lie in the street of a city with two "mystical" names, Sodom and Egypt. We know that the city's actual name is Jerusalem, because we are told it is "where their Lord was crucified." But, why the symbolic names Sodom and Egypt?

Sodom was infamous for its rampant overwhelming sexual immorality, particularly homosexuality (when two angels came to visit, the men of the city wanted to gang rape them); God judged that city, totally destroying it and its people (Genesis 19:1-29). Egypt was a land and people overflowing with idolatry of many false gods, and God judged that land and its people, particularly singling out its false gods (Exodus 12:12). Perhaps Jerusalem at the time the Tribulation starts will be openly practicing gross sexual immorality, particularly homosexuality,

and also idolatry. Now, we might ask, how can there be idolatry nowadays? There are not going to be golden calves in Israel in today's sophisticated modern world, are there? Perhaps not, but remember the testimony of Scripture:

"Therefore consider the members of your body as dead to...greed, which amounts to idolatry." (Colossians 3:5).

There may not be golden calves anymore in Israel, but the modern Israelites may become so successful in industry, farming, trade and money, that they could be given over to greed, which as we are told, "amounts to idolatry." This dual wickedness of immorality and idolatry may also help explain why people living in Jerusalem, stinging under the rebuke of the holy testimony of the anointed Two Witnesses, would want to harm the prophets of God. Their consciences are tormented because their deeds are evil.

"This is judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men love the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." (John 3:19-20).

Also, concerning the people of the world who follow the Antichrist, Paul wrote that the Antichrist would come with lying wonders "and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

They "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." They don't want the truth! Paul went on to say of God's actions against them were "in order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians 2:12).

Those living in spiritual darkness avoid the Light of God through Jesus Christ, and rather than repent, they take "pleasure in wickedness."

This certainly expresses the attitude of those who will rejoice when the Antichrist overthrows and kills the Two Witnesses. In vicious spite, they won't even allow the dead bodies to be buried; instead, these unbelievers all over the world will gloat as they look upon the two bodies for three and a half days. They celebrate, and even send gifts to one another in a satanic "Christmas" of gift-giving.

What is of interest about this scene, is that in a former technological era, as in the 1800s, skeptics and critics said that the Bible is not true because it was physically impossible for the "peoples, tribes, tongues and nations" from around the entire world to all look upon two dead bodies in the space of just 3-1/2 days. They reasoned that a sailing ship or a steamship could not make the journey from, say, America to the Middle East, in less than several weeks' time, let alone 3-1/2 days.

That criticism has evaporated in the face of incredible technology prevailing today. In the late 20th century during Desert Storm in Iraq, the cable television news organization CNN got the first video from the Middle East, and the world, instead of viewing tapes made for broadcast

later, was astonished to see the coverage "live", as-it-happened. With improvements in newer technology since then, seeing live broadcasts from across the world no longer amazes us--we take it for granted. Add to that the explosive growth of the Internet with live streaming video available 24/7, and video capabilities in cell phones, the reality today is that the world is now well prepared to literally be able to see the bodies of the Two Witnesses lie in the street of Jerusalem for 3-1/2 days, live, as-it-happens. Even though Israel had become a nation again back in 1948, this technological feat was not possible then; it is only in the last few years that our technology has developed to the point that it has made possible that prophetic fulfillment. Despite the jeering of skeptics, God knew 2000 years ago what our later technology would enable us to do, and told us the truth ahead of time! If we can trust God to know that and correctly give it to us in prophecy, we can also trust Him to give us other things correctly in prophecy in His Holy Word, the Bible.

"But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' The they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." (Rev 11:11-13).

The enemies gloating over the deaths of the Two Witnesses get the shock of their lives. After 3-1/2 days, God raises the Two Witnesses to life again. The amazing part is that it is accomplished in full view and plain sight of their enemies. People watching via satellite, or via Internet, or via cell phone video (or by whatever new technology that may arise after this writing), are fearful. Then something even more astonishing happens.

A loud voice, no doubt picked up by microphones and heard around the world, tells the Two Witnesses, "Come up here." These two anointed men of God go up into heaven in a cloud, as their enemies watch them! Then God strikes Jerusalem with a terrifying earthquake, and a tenth of the city crumples, and 7,000 people are killed. The rest gave glory to God. This, by the way, does not mean they were saved, now finally believing in God, but only that they gave credit where credit was due by acknowledging it to be by the hand of God Himself.

As a additional point, time-wise, the death of the Two Witnesses and their coming back to life is just after the middle of the seven years, the time when the martyrdom gets under way that we saw in the fifth Seal, where the souls were gathered under the altar and cried out to God about how long He was going to wait before avenging their blood (Rev 6:9-11).

"The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their throne before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, 'We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begin to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear

Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.'" (Rev 11:14-18).

When we saw in Rev 10:11 that John was told, "You must prophesy again," we saw that the word "again" is the Greek word "palin". This set aside the countdown of the 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls, and took us back a few years in time to the very start of the seven years to look for a while at the new temple and Two Witnesses. Now, in verse 14, when it says "the second woe is past", the sacred text is informing us that the "palin" is over, and that we are returning to where we left off in the future to resume the countdown of the 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls. We have seen the "second woe", as revealed in chapter 9 with the demonic "Euphrates Four" and their terrible army of 200,000,000 that slays a third of mankind. With "palin" we had set that aside to look for a while at the new temple and Two Witnesses. Now we are returning to that "second woe", except that we are being told it is over, and the third woe is next.

Finally, the seventh angel blows his trumpet. The seven Bowls of wrath are contained in the seventh Trumpet. In other words, these seven Bowls together are the "third woe." Loud voices in heaven give praise to God (vs. 15). The Church, seen symbolically as the 24 elders, worship God (vs. 16), and give thanks to Almighty God (vs. 17). In Rev 1:4 and also Rev 4:8, God is referred to as Him "who is and who was and who is to come." In the cry of the 24 elders in Rev 11:17, curiously, part of that phrase ("who is to come") is missing. Why? Because "you have taken Your great power and have begun to reign." There is no more "who is to come," as in looking for the Lord to come to establish a future coming kingdom, because that kingdom is no longer "to come." The setting up of that kingdom is now beginning, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will shortly take up kingship over that kingdom in His Second Coming, as we shall see in Rev 19.

We are told "the nations were enraged." Certainly, this was true because of the ministry of the Two Witnesses. More to the point, though, the rage is ultimately aimed at God Himself, of whom the Two Witnesses were only representatives, agents as it were. A prophecy exists in Psalm 2 that also speaks of the rage of the nations against God and against Jesus His Son, who is both Savior and anointed ruler ("Christ" means "anointed one", or "Messiah.")

"Why are the nations in an uproar and the people devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD and against his Anointed." (Ps 2:1-2).

Even as the 144,000 were spreading the gospel and winning people to faith in Jesus Christ throughout the world, the rest of the people were growing resentful, angry and hateful of God and His Son. The people of the world had had quite enough of God and Jesus! At this point they want to strip away "fetters" and "cords" from God that restrain them from following their evil desires.

"Let us tear their fetters, apart and cast away their cords from us!" (Ps 2:3).

God's response is to laugh them to scorn, as if they could somehow do anything against God Almighty!

"He who sits in the heavens laughs, the LORD scoffs at them." (Ps 2:4).

With the blowing of the seventh Trumpet, God's wrath is poured out, as is also prophesied:

"Then he will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury." (Psalm 2:5).

The time has come to judge the dead (which we will see finalized in Rev 20), reward the faithful, and to destroy the unrighteous. Of special note is the expression in vs. 18 "to destroy those who destroy the earth." In this passage, the Greek word for "destroy" is "diaphtheiro", which means "to rot thoroughly," or "to ruin." We saw earlier during the second Seal a new world war breaks out, and that it almost certainly is nuclear war. Radiation makes land unsafe and unsuitable for human habitation. In effect, it ruins the land. With radioactive fallout just about everywhere, is it any wonder that the 24 elders cry out that it is time to "ruin" those who "ruin" the earth? The effects of that retributive ruin, a very great and terrible ruin, will be the cumulative effect of the seven Bowls as they are poured out on a wicked and rebellious humankind.

"And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple; and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm" (Rev 11:19).

The temple and altar during the days of the Jewish temples on earth were merely copies of true ones in heaven. The Levite priests, we are told, are those "who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle for, 'see,' He says, 'that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.'" (Hebrews 8:5).

We have already seen a true golden altar in heaven (Rev 6:9; 7:3-5). Now we see a true temple of God in heaven, and also the true ark of the covenant. In the vision we see lightning, sounds, thunder, and earthquake and a hailstorm. I believe these things occur on earth, heralding the blowing of the seventh trumpet, but they are NOT themselves the judgment of the seventh Trumpet, just harbingers of the terrible judgments to begin in the Bowl series. It would have to be on earth that people will see and experience them since a hailstorm or an earthquake in heaven makes no sense. To the rebellious inhabitants of the earth, though, they make plenty of sense! God is getting ready to crush the rebels with the seven Bowls of wrath, which we will see in Rev 16.

Christian author Hal Lindsey has said that there will be no material advantage to being alive on earth during the time of the reign of the Antichrist. Friend, as of this writing, neither the Rapture nor the Tribulation has occurred yet. There's still time to escape these terrors and horrors coming so soon upon the earth. Don't be like the angry, resentful people who hate the Two Witnesses. Turn to Jesus Christ today. Confess that you have sinned and deserve death; acknowledge Jesus went to the cross and paid for all your sins, died, was buried for three days, and rose again from the dead. Tell Him you receive Him as your Savior.

Not only will you escape the torment of hell, you will discover that Heaven is going to be a lot more fun than you ever dreamed. The pleasure of Heaven, though, is not in a Place, but in a Person: God!

"In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore." (Ps 16:11b).

Don't miss out on all the joys of eternity with God. Trust Christ Jesus as your personal Savior today!

Chapter Twelve

"A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth" (Revelation 12:1-2).

There are in Revelation several places where a departure is made from the strictly chronological countdown of events occurring during the seven years of the 70th Week of Daniel's Seventy Weeks prophecy. In other words, the progression in time of the revealing of the seven Seals, seven Trumpets and seven Bowls, is put "on hold" to step aside to look at other critical, need-to-know information.

In Revelation chapter 11, we saw such a departure. After the blowing of the sixth Trumpet judgment, which occurs in time after the middle of the 70th Week, the narrative was set aside temporarily to back up in time to reveal the new temple and the ministry of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-13) at the beginning of the 70th week. Once that information was completed, the narrative returned back in time and place to the progression of the Trumpets judgments (Rev 11:14).

Such departures from the strict chronology of the 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls throughout the Tribulation are called by scholars "parentheses." Revelation chapters 12, 13, 14, 17 and 18 are also parenthetical chapters. It is in failing to take into consideration that these sections are parenthetical, a "step aside" in order to look at other information outside the scope of the Seals/Trumpets/Bowls, that some people get hopelessly confused in trying to understand the book of Revelation. In the strict time sequence of the "countdown" of God's judgments, Rev 11:14 is followed immediately, in time, by Rev 15:1 through Rev 16:21, and then picks up again at 19:1 unto the end of the book.

In order to give us a fuller understanding, God deemed it wise and necessary to interrupt the time sequence so He could fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle as to what is going on during these cataclysmic seven years. Concerning Revelation 12, this parenthetical chapter gives us a sweeping panorama of events occurring over a span of some 36 centuries, starting from the beginning of the children of Israel, down through the centuries to the time of Jesus, and continues on until it sweeps past us into OUR future, arriving at the time of the events of the Tribulation period.

Having said that, let us now consider Revelation 12.

John sees a "great sign" in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and crowned with twelve stars. As we have seen throughout Revelation, everything at Rev 4:1 and beyond has a Jewish style, flavor and nature. So here, too, here another such symbol that modern Israelites will understand from the book of Genesis. The eleventh son of Israel was Joseph, whose story is told in Genesis chapters 37 through 50. As part of His redemptive purposes, God had big plans for Joseph.

In Genesis 37, Joseph had had two dreams from God about how God was going to elevate him and cause others to bow to his authority (though it is certain Joseph did not know at the time just how literally those dreams would come true.) Let's look at the second of those dreams.

"Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, 'Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?'" (Genesis 37:9-10).

Symbolically, the sun and moon indeed represented Joseph's father and mother, and the eleven stars his eleven brothers. When we fast forward from Genesis (where the story of Joseph is told) to Revelation 12, we have that symbology again, but slightly altered. The woman represents, not Joseph alone, but the entire people of Israel. The crown of twelve stars represents the twelve tribes of Israel, including Joseph. The sun and the moon represent, not his father and mother, but all the patriarchs from whom came all this great people represented by the woman.

The vision portrays her as "with child." This is showing how the Messiah would come from among the descendants of Israel and occupy the throne of David. The woman "cried out, being in labor and pain to give birth."

The coming of the Messiah from out of Israel was prophesied long ago:

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness. From then on and forevermore, the zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Having seen the woman, let's look at the next major figure.

"Then another sign appeared in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. And, she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." (Revelation 12:3-5).

This scene of a great red dragon is startling, to say the least. Most everybody you talk to today knows what a dragon is. Of course, everybody knows it's a myth, so why the fascination with dragons? How is it that this myth was already common knowledge in the days of the writing of Revelation, almost two thousand years ago, such that the ancient people already had knowledge of what a dragon is, so that the Scripture could refer to it, and everybody would nod their head in understanding? When the Bible refers to an ostrich, horse, dog, eagle, lion, snake, etc., we all know and recognize these as real animals. But, a dragon? Everybody knows dragons were myths...or were they?

Dragon comes from the Greek "drakon," meaning a "fabulous serpent," or a reptile. Dinosaur means "terrible lizard," also a reptile. No one today has seen a dinosaur, yet we know from fossils that such monsters existed once. Is it possible from ancient accounts to discern that perhaps dragons once existed too? Evolution says dinosaurs died out many millions of years ago. However, evolution also denies Bible prophecy, which we have seen is real and actual because a very real God has actually given us a record of the future, and shown us that He is very much in control of events rapidly coming to a head with the Rapture and the Tribulation.

It may be that evolution is not as iron-clad solidly proven as its adherents zealously and vehemently argue. In the end, evolution is NOT true science, for it violates laws of science (such as the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, a.k.a. the Law of Increasing Entropy, and the universally known law of Cause and Effect), and ultimately attempts to describe a universe without a God. It is really a false religion for those who want a world without God. Such adherents, if they are not careful, may well fall in love with the Antichrist, and miss out on eternal life.

What the human race calls dragons may have been simply some dinosaurs that survived in ancient times, and these few remaining species, already dying unto extinction, were what ancient people came to understand and fear as dragons. However, because of the ever-popular idea of a fire-breathing dragon, there may also be a case in the Bible where such a creature actually existed once.

In the book of Job, after a long philosophical and theological discussion occurs between Job and his friends, God steps into the picture and starts interrogating Job. God questions Job about His creation, first about the earth (Job 38:4), the sea (38:8), the morning (38:12), and other manner of physical attributes of the universe. While the questions are framed in poetic language, they all describe very real things. Then God moves on to animals, such as the lion (38:39), raven (38:41), mountain goats (39:10), wild donkeys (39:5), wild ox (39:9), horse (39:19), and the hawk (39:26) and eagle (39:27).

In the midst of discussing real animals, God questions Job about two spectacular creatures, Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (41:1-34). Translators usually translate Behemoth as hippopotamus, but the physical description of a hippo has little resemblance to the Behemoth.

First, the Behemoth is likely the largest animal God ever created:

"He is the first of the ways of God." (Job 40:19a) New American Standard Bible (NASB)

"He is the chief of the ways of God." King James Version (KJV)

Second, the Behemoth "bends his tail like a cedar." If you ever seen a hippopotamus, you will have observed its tail is very small and short, nothing at all "like a cedar" tree! But, if you look at an apatosaurus, like the brontosaurus, now there's an animal that "bends its tail like a cedar"!

Now, we come to Leviathan. Translators usually translate Leviathan as a crocodile. Yet, here too, no crocodile matches the spectacular physical description of Leviathan. Keep in mind that in Job, God has been speaking of His creation, and has been telling of animals which we all recognize as real. Speaking in that same context, He says of Leviathan that "out of his mouth go

burning torches; sparks of fire leap forth. Out of his nostrils smoke goes forth as from a boiling pot and burning rushes. His breath kindles coals, and a flame goes forth from his mouth." When we read the entire chapter for a detailed look, we find what was likely the true origin of the incredible creature called a fire-breathing dragon. That chapter ends, saying of Leviathan, "Nothing on earth is like him, one made without fear." It may well be that the ancient legend of St George and the Dragon may actually be a telling of the death of the last living dragon, putting dragons into extinction. Likely, it was killing cattle and such, making of itself such a nuisance and a danger to the people and the land, and a hearty knight had to dispatch it. Legends of dragons are found around the world; if nothing like that ever existed, how could those legends be so universally known?

In the end, however we understand the nature of dragons, whether myth or reality, something now extinct lived long ago on earth whose existence was such common knowledge that people could easily refer to and recognize it as a dragon, whether a dinosaur or a Leviathan. In fact, the strangeness of the vision of the dragon in Revelation 12 is not in the figure of a dragon per se, but in that it had seven heads and ten horns, which a "regular" dragon would not. In our next chapter on Revelation chapter 13, we shall see some parallel visions from Daniel of animals which were real, but also had differences that made them spectacular.

The account in Revelation draws upon this common knowledge of dragons to paint a picture of a red dragon, a fearsome thing, waiting to devour that very child to which the woman was about to give birth. We already know the woman represents the people of Israel, and the child the Messiah. The dragon's identity is no secret; it is none other than Satan (Rev 12:9).

The dragon has seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems. The seven heads represent seven world empires, and the seven diadems are crowns of rulership, as for a king. This picture tells us that the devil is the true ruler, mover and shaker behind the thrones of the empires of Man through the ages. This is seen clearly in Ezekiel chapter 28. In verses 1-10, God prophetically speaks to a human ruler over the kingdom of Tyre. Then in verses 11-19, God speaks to the true ruler who is the power behind the throne, one who was sealed in perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, who was in the garden of Eden, who was the anointed cherub and walked amidst the stones of fire. The latter ruler is clearly an angelic being, for no human being could match that description. This "cherub", once a faithful servant of God, rebelled and turned to wickedness (Ezekiel 28:15-17). It is the story of Lucifer, who became Satan, the devil, the serpent who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Revelation 12:4 tells us his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Again, because Revelation is written in symbols, these are not actual suns in outer space. Angels are spoken of as "stars" in Job 38:7, and we already saw a falling star, a demon, in Rev 9:1. Rather, this scene represents the story of the rebellion of the dragon, Satan, and the angels that joined him in his rebellion. It is certain other angels followed the devil in his rebellion, for Jesus spoke of "the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41b). The sweeping away a third of the stars tells us that one-third of all God's angels rebelled against Him under Satan's leadership. These rebellious angels fell into spiritual darkness, becoming demons.

How many angels and demons are there? Even though one-third rebelled, two-thirds remained faithful. In other words, for every "bad" angel, there are two "good" angels. The devil and his evil angels are outnumbered, two-to-one. As for how many, remember that Revelation 5:11 says the good angels number "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands." A myriad is 10,000. A "myriad of myriads" is literally $10,000 \times 10,000 = 100,000,000$, and a "thousand of thousands" is 1,000,000. Therefore, there are hundreds of millions, and millions more, if not billions, of faithful good angels. Correspondingly, there may well be hundreds of millions, if not billions, of evil angels we call demons, but again remember that God's holy angels outnumber them two-to-one.

So, we see the red dragon waiting "before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child."

Bible teacher Clarence Larkin (1850-1924) wrote a commentary called "The Book of Revelation." In his commentary on Revelation 12:3-4, he wrote the following about the murderous nature of Satan.

(Begin Larkin quote)

John tells us that the "Dragon" stood before the "Sun Clothed Woman" ready to "devour her child" as soon as it was born. It is intensely interesting reading to trace in the scriptures the story of Satan's efforts to prevent the birth of the "Man-Child" CHRIST, and then after His birth to destroy Him before He could reach the cross and purchase man's redemption. As soon as Satan had accomplished the Fall of Adam and Eve, he found himself under the curse of God, and was told the "SEED" of the Woman should bruise his head. Gen. 3:14-15. This aroused the enmity of Satan and he determined to prevent the birth of the promised "Seed," or, if that were not possible, to destroy the "Seed" after birth. So as soon as Abel was born, from whom the promised "Seed" was to come, Satan schemed for his destruction, and finally got his brother Cain to kill him. Then the "Sons of God" (Angels) doubtless at Satan's instigation, married the "Daughters of Men" (Cainites), and their "sin," and the character of their offspring moved God to destroy mankind from off the earth. This was what Satan planned for, and would have been a victory for Satan and a defeat for God, so God decided to spare the race, and begin over again with a representative man, Noah. But it was not long before Noah planted a vineyard and drank himself drunk with the wine therefrom, the result the curse of Canaan the son of Ham. Gen 9:18-27. Then the people began to multiply and Satan filled their heart with pride and presumption and they rose and built the "Tower of Babel," the result the "Confusion of Tongues" and the unity of the race broken up. Gen. 11:1-9. Then the Lord called Abraham and the fight narrowed down to his seed. Abraham was 75 years old, and had no children, and Sarah his wife was 65 years of age and barren (Gen 16:1). Doubtless, Satan laughed at the situation because of Sarah's barrenness, in which probably he had a hand, but to show Satan that he could work a miracle, if necessary, to produce the promised "seed," God waited until Sarah was "past age," until she was 90 years old (Gen. 17:17), and then He caused her to conceive and bear the promised "seed." Gen. 18:9-15; 21:1-3.

When Isaac was about 12 years of age Satan moved God to test Abraham by commanding him to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice upon Mount Moriah. It was similar to the test of Job. Job 1:6-12; 2:3-6. The plan for Isaac's destruction failed, for when God saw that Abraham was willing and ready to slay his son, He intervened and spared his life. When Isaac grew up and married Rebekah,

Satan, to prevent her having offspring, caused her to be barren, but Isaac prayed and God heard his prayer (Gen. 25:20-21), and twins were born. Then Satan, when they had grown up, stirred up enmity between them, hoping that the tragedy of Cain and Abel would be repeated, and Jacob through whom Christ was to come, would be slain. When the time came for Moses to be born, Satan put it into the heart of Pharaoh to order that all male Hebrew children should be destroyed at birth, his purpose being to destroy the male line of descent altogether. But his plan was frustrated by a baby's tear. Ex. 2:5-10. And so it went on, until at the death of King Jehoshaphat his son Jehoram slew all his brethren with the sword (2 Chron. 21:13), thus reducing the "seed royal" down to one life. But Jehoram had children. Then the Arabians slew all his children but one, Ahaziah the youngest. 2 Chron. 21:17; 22:1. But Ahaziah had children. These in turn were slain by Athaliah his mother, doubtless at the instigation of Satan. She thought she had slain them all, but God interposed and rescued the infant son at the hands of his aunt, who hid him in the Temple (2 Chron 22:10-12), and for 6 years all the hopes of God's people as to the promised "seed" rested on that infant's life. During the Captivity Satan tried to destroy the whole Hebrew nation at the hands of Haman, but a very little thing, a king's sleepless night, frustrated that plan. Esther 3:8-15; 6:1-11. But the story is too long.

At last the promised "SEED" was born. Then Satan, failing to prevent His birth, determined to destroy Him before He could reach the Cross. To that end he prompted Herod, through jealousy and fear, to slay all the male children at Bethlehem under 2 years of age, but Joseph warned of God in a dream, had fled with the infant Christ to Egypt. When Christ entered on His ministry Satan met Him in the Wilderness and suggested that He throw Himself from the Pinnacle of the Temple. Foiled in that Satan sought Christ's life by getting His own townspeople to attempt to cast Him over a precipice. Luke 4:29. The two storms on the Sea of Galilee were but attempts of Satan to destroy Christ. You cannot rebuke a thing, you can only rebuke a person, and when Christ rebuked the winds and the sea, He rebuked the person (Satan), who had caused their disturbance. Matt. 8:24-27.

Then Satan renewed the fight through priests and Pharisees until he succeeded at last in getting one of Christ's own disciples, Judas, to sell His Master. Then amid the shades of Gethsemane, through physical exhaustion, he sought to kill Christ. And when he at last succeeded in having Christ crucified through the agency of Pilate, he thought he had conquered, but to be doubly sure he took good care to have the place of burial sealed and guarded.
(End of Larkin quote).

Even if we disagree with some of Larkin's depictions of Satan's attempts at murder, there remains more than enough evidence that Satan has attempted repeatedly to "devour her child." Jesus said of Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44b). How the forces of darkness must have shaken when Christ rose from the dead! How Satan and his dark angels must have raged and feared! The Apostle Paul wrote of the wisdom of God, "the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8).

In seeking to kill Christ, Satan set into motion the seeds of his own doom. Had Christ NOT been slain by crucifixion, mankind would not have been redeemed. Satan unwittingly helped achieve

the doom he sought to prevent. After the resurrection, Jesus lingered a while to further teach His disciples, and then ascended into heaven (Acts 1:1-12).

The prophecy of Psalm 2 says:

"Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware" (Psalm 2:8-9).

When Jesus comes back (seen in Revelation 19), He will indeed begin "to rule all the nations with a rod of iron."

So far, we have seen in Revelation 12 the sweep of time from the very beginnings of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Joseph in particular, and have come forward in time up to the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Now the vision sweeps forward about another 2,000 years to our day, indeed (as of the time of this writing) to the time of OUR future!

"Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days" (Rev 12:6).

The Abomination of Desolation is the pivotal point of the seven years. The Two Witnesses testify about Jesus as the Christ (that is, the Messiah) for 1260 days, which comprise the first half of the Tribulation period. Then at the midst of the "Week," the Antichrist goes into the temple of God, commits his abominable sacrilege, and then goes out to confront and kill the Two Witnesses. It is for the events happening at this point in our future that Jesus made a stern warning for those who would be living in Judea when this would occur.

"Therefore when you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath." (Matthew 24:15-20).

The woman of the vision is Israel, and the prophetic warning is given to the descendants of Israel living in the last days when the events of the book of Revelation occur. Jesus said when you see the abomination of desolation, drop what you are doing and run for your life! Don't stop to pack your bags. The need is urgent; indeed, it is a matter of life or death! The warning of "woe" to those who are pregnant or nursing is given because speed is essential and they cannot run very fast, encumbered as they are with unborn or infant children. The prayer that it not be in the winter or on a Sabbath implies a need for travelling a distance that the winter or Sabbath would hamper; not only must the people in Judea flee fast, they must flee far away to the mountains. Many scholars believe the Israelis of this, our day, will likely flee to the ancient city of Petra, a natural fortress, where God will take care of them. The time they stay there under God's care is 1260 days, which is the second half of the Tribulation period.

"And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." (Revelation 12:7-9).

What a sight! An all-out war breaks out in the heavenly places between Good and Evil. On the side of Good is Michael the archangel, one of the chief princes of all the good angels, indeed, possibly the mightiest of all God's faithful angels. Michael is appointed by God as the guardian angel over the people of Israel.

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued." (Daniel 12:1).

At this point in the vision of the woman and the dragon, we have reached the middle of the seven years. On earth the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation. Modern Jews, seeing this and having heard of Jesus' warning, flee to the mountains, very likely to Petra. In the heavenly places, we have Satan, the archfiend and god of this world, the Prince of Darkness, the devil, dragon and serpent, with all his dark and evil angels, also called demons. I think it safe to suggest that Satan looks upon the Antichrist's Abomination of Desolation with smirking satisfaction. War then erupts. Enough is enough!

When aircraft battle in the sky, it's called a "dogfight." Remembering that since there are "myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" more, this colossal war becomes the dogfight of the universe! With a roar, angels both good and bad square off and fight it out on a never before imagined scale. One good angel and his comrade angel fly up to a vile demon and battle begins. An angelic prince attacks a demonic prince (Daniel 10:20-21). Two legions of righteous angels engage one legion of demons. No doubt at the center of it all, Michael the archangel and Satan the devil fight each other, the two greatest beings in the universe, apart from God Himself, clashing with all their power and might and strength! The clashes and roar of innumerable angelic battles beyond imagination shake the very heavens!

Finally, Michael deals Satan a stunning blow, and it's over. The powers of Evil are beaten. Good wins!

Satan and all his fellow rebels are hurled to the earth, defeated and humiliated. And VERY angry!

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the

devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.'"
(Revelation 12:10-12).

The time has come for the salvation and power and kingdom of God to proceed.

By Jesus Christ shedding His blood on the cross, believers have been saved from the Penalty of sin. As we live our lives in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are being saved from the Power of sin. Once the devil and his angels are defeated and cast out, we will be saved from the Presence of sin.

This passage in Revelation says "the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night" (verse 10). According to Strong's Concordance, the word "devil" comes from the Greek "diabolos", meaning, "slanderer" or "false accuser." Throughout the history of mankind, the devil has ever stood ready to accuse God's people. Many people sincerely think the devil lives in the fires of Hell, has red skin, horns, and forked tail and a pitchfork. This is a popular but nonsensical image. He rather disguises himself like an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). He tries to approach people as one who is wise and knowing; case in point, look at his approach to Eve in the Garden of Eden to induce her to sin (Genesis 3:1-1). Satan has been free to roam about as he wishes, and to approach the throne of God (Job 1:6-7). When he roams like this, he is looking for opportunities to devour someone (1 Peter 5:8). He stood at the right hand to accuse the high priest Joshua before the Lord (Zechariah 3:1-2).

In contrast to Satan's tactics, John the Apostle tells us that Jesus is our "Advocate" to intercede on our behalf:

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 2:1-2a).

The word "propitiation" means a sacrificial action which atones for a wrong done in order to make things right again. Because of our sin, we deserve the death penalty. By Jesus' dying in our place, the thing needed to make us right again with God was accomplished. God's offended Holiness was satisfied, in that our sins were punished; yet, God's mercy was also satisfied, in that we were spared having to be the ones to pay that terrible price; God's love was satisfied, in that while He was under no obligation to do so, He paid the price Himself for us through His Son because He loved us; God's grace was His love gift of forgiveness being offered to us at no cost to us--free!

Imagine with me a courtroom scene in heaven. God the Father sits on the judge's bench. I stand accused, Satan at my left hand accusing me before God, saying, "Did you see what Paul said and what he did today? Judge him at once! He deserves death!" My heart sinks, for I have indeed sinned (never mind that Satan tempted me in the first place to do those things.) Then Jesus steps forward at my right hand, and said, "Father, it is true that Paul said and did that, but I died for his sins, and he has trusted in Me for the forgiveness of his sins." The Father slams down the judge's gavel, saying, "Offense noted. Payment made. Forgiveness granted. Case dismissed!" And then He smiles at me and says, "I love you, my son."

Satan certainly appeared before God and made slanderous remarks about both Job and God, that Job only loved God because God provided great things for him, and that God was unworthy of being loved for Himself and men would not love Him if He didn't do things for men (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5).

We as humans overcome the accusations Satan hurls against us by the blood of the Lamb, in that Jesus died for our sins and was raised again. We also overcome by the word of our testimony, in that we gladly confess the name of Jesus before others.

So, when Revelation tells us of the rejoicing in heaven that the accuser of the brethren has been cast down, it is really good news indeed! However, a stern warning remains at this point in time after the battle is won.

"Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath" (vs. 12). After his defeat by Michael, Satan is very angry. He and all his evil angels descend on earth to make a last stand. There is an old saying, "Misery loves company." Satan realizes at last that his doom is approaching (i.e. "his time is short"). He figures that if he has to go down, he's taking as many as he can of the human race with him to their doom as well.

"And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." (Revelation 12:13-17).

Satan gets evicted from heaven and thrown to the earth at the time of the Abomination of Desolation. He comes down and, as many scholars believe, enters into the Antichrist in a total possession. First thing, he kills the Two Witnesses, then in his hate for God he turns to attack the Jews. It is because of this that Jesus warned those in Judea to drop what they are doing and flee to the mountains, and not to turn back to their house to get their things. The devil tries to annihilate the Jews. It might be that he literally creates a flood of water to drown them, or else something equally powerful. Before dismissing the idea of a flood of water altogether, remember that Pharaoh's magicians duplicated (to a point) the miracles of God done through Moses (Ex 7:22; 8:7). Satan caused fire to come down out of the sky to kill Job's sheep (Job 1:16) and also created a strong wind that collapsed the house where Job's children were feasting, killing them all (Job 1:18-19). So, let us not be skeptical that he has the power to create a literal flood of water. Remember, too, that while our days (prior to the Rapture and Tribulation) are pretty much miracle-free, once the Rapture happens and Tribulation starts, miracles will be happening all the time. It will be a VERY different world after these End-Times things get under way.

Whatever the means, the devil tries to kill the Jews, and the earth swallows the flood. God grants the woman (Israel) extraordinary speed to get to safety, signified by the "two wings of the great

eagle." In Revelation 13, we shall see more of this persecution in prophecies from the book of Daniel. One of the terms used in Daniel is a time period designated "a time and times and half a time." In Daniel, that term was pretty mysterious. Here in Revelation 12, it is decoded. The woman, Israel, flees for 1260 days; then again, the woman flees for "a time and times and half a time." So, by this we see the latter expression is "a year and two years and half a year," meaning 3-1/2 years, 42 months, or 1260 days. What was concealed in Daniel is revealed in Revelation.

The devil, already filled with "great wrath," gets even more frustrated, and goes out to "make war" (meaning, to persecute and kill) those who have become believers in Jesus the Messiah who came from out of Israel. The slaughter of believers is what we saw in Rev. 6:9, the fifth Seal, as "the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained."

Friend, if you have not yet trusted in Jesus Christ, and the Rapture has not yet happened as you read this, there is still time to escape all this madness. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31). The "and your household" means that He is not just interested in saving you, but in also saving all your family as well. Tell them about Jesus, so they, too, may believe and be saved!

If the Rapture has already happened as you read this, be strong and faithful to Jesus, no matter what, even unto death, and you will receive an eternal reward.

Choose Jesus Christ today!

Chapter Thirteen

"And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names." (Revelation 13:1).

Up to this moment, we have referred to the Antichrist but as an accessory to other things we were studying. Now, the main spotlight is on him directly, as well as the dragon and a new person entering the fray, the False Prophet. God is a Trinity, meaning one God who is a unity, or single God, comprised of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each Person is fully and truly God, each being all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, and present everywhere. He is holy, good and righteous, and He is love. He is perfect and pure, and He is light in whom there is no shadow. He is truth, glory and majesty. He is the creator, and He is master, teacher, comforter, provider and judge. He dwells forever and ever, and gives eternal life to whom He wills. He sustains and renews, and gives joy inexpressible. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and He is God!

In previous chapters, we showed how Satan, once called Lucifer, desired to take over God's place as the "Most High." Here again is the Scripture revealing that.

"How thou art fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." (Isaiah 14:12-14, KJV).

Ezekiel also tells of him.

"You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you." (Ezekiel 28:14-15).

As the "cherub who covers," it likely meant he was hovering over the very throne of God, his wings outstretched like a covering canopy over God's throne, close enough to reach out and touch Him. God is light, and Lucifer desired that light; all the attention and worship being directed toward God, he wanted for himself. Was he not Lucifer, whose name means "morning star" or the "shining one"? Though he was truly a being of incredible beauty and splendor, he made the mistake of thinking the glory of God was his own, as if the moon could somehow think its reflected light from the sun was its own light.

God said of him, "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground." (Ezekiel 28:17).

Since the "Most High" is a rank and position for only one person, only one could hold it, so Satan wanted to overthrow God. Lucifer, in colossal folly and madness, conceived murder in his

heart, thinking he would kill God so he could take God's place. Ezekiel said, "You were internally filled with violence, and you sinned." (Ezekiel 28:16b) Satan, the angel who would be God, was cast out as profane. Yet, to this very day, Satan's desire has ever been to be worshipped as God.

Here in Revelation 13, we see the culmination of Satan's desire to be God. Since God is a Trinity, we see Satan doing his best to become a Trinity. It was C.S. Lewis who said that there is nothing original about evil; it cannot create something new, but it can only pervert, or "bend" something already existing. We will see in this chapter that the dragon, Satan, corresponds to God the Father; the Beast (the Antichrist) corresponds to Jesus Christ the Son; and the False Prophet corresponds to the Holy Spirit. Many people, such as the Watchtower Society's Jehovah's Witnesses cult of today, have strived to deny the Trinity nature of God, no doubt provoked and incited to do so by lying demonic spirits working on the devil's behalf to deceive and thwart the truth about God. Is it not ironic that, in seeking to imitate the Trinity by creating his own "unholy trinity," Satan gives "back door" proof that the Trinity nature of God is true?

The dragon stands on the sand of the seashore. Here, the "unholy father" calls forth his "unholy son." As the saying goes, "Like father, like son." The dragon was seen in Revelation 12 as having seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. Here we see the "Beast", who is the Antichrist, come forth out of the restless sea of humanity, also having seven heads and ten horns. However, there is a difference. The dragon had seven diadems, which signify political rulership, one on each of his seven heads, where heads mean seven world empires of man that he ruled from behind the scenes. The Beast also has diadems, but they are ten in number, and they are on his ten horns, not on the seven heads like the dragon. The difference is that Satan has been around during the time of all seven kingdoms of men, but the Antichrist will only be around for the final empire which will consist of ten nations; hence, the diadems Antichrist has are on those ten horns alone, not on the seven heads. In other words, Satan sought to exercise political power throughout many centuries in seven great kingdoms of man, so he is shown with seven diadems. The Antichrist will only exercise political power over one great kingdom of man, the last of the seven, and so there are ten diadems on those ten horns, or rulers, who comprise that seventh, last kingdom.

The Scripture says of the Son of God with regard to God the Father:
"And He is the radiance of the glory and the exact representation of His nature..." (Hebrews 1:3a).

Moreover, the Apostle Paul says of Jesus:
"He is the image of the invisible God..." (Colossians 1:15a).

With regard to the Antichrist, or "Beast", having seven heads and ten horns like the dragon, let us realize that just as Jesus the Messiah exactly represents God the Father, so the Antichrist exactly represents Satan. As Jesus Christ whom we could see is the image of God whom we cannot see, so Antichrist is the man people can see who is the image of the dragon whom we cannot see, for Satan is a spirit, not flesh and blood like us.

Satan, being a spirit, came whispering to one of Job's friends in a dream, slandering Job and God (Job 4:12-19). In our daily struggles against spiritual darkness, we are not battling in bodily warfare, but in spiritual warfare.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12).

We just saw that Jesus "is the radiance of [God's] glory." Even as God is light, so Satan is darkness. If Jesus Christ is the personification of God's radiance, then Antichrist is the personification of Satan's darkness. Yet, let us not think they are equals. Just as Satan was a poor and inferior reflection of God, so Antichrist is a poor and inferior reflection of Jesus Christ, not unlike how the moon in our night sky is no match for the glory and splendor of the sun in our daytime skies. Nonetheless, let none think the Antichrist harmless; he will be the very personification of evil, the most powerful evil man who has ever lived, matched perhaps only by his partner in devilry, the False Prophet (called in Rev 13 the second beast "like a lamb").

When the Beast (the Antichrist) comes up out of the sea, in addition to having seven heads, ten horns, and diadems like his "father," the devil, he also has on his heads "blasphemous names." Blasphemy is an act of vilifying or speaking evil of God, or of speaking wrongly about God. When Jesus made claim to deity, the Jews accused Him of blasphemy.

"Jesus said to them, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.' Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy.'" (Matthew 26:64-65).

The alleged blasphemy was not in saying something evil directly about God; but, when a mere human being makes such a claim, it becomes idolatry in proclaiming a man to be God, and it indirectly attacks God, for it lowers God to the status of a mere man (John 10:33). In Jesus Christ's case, He really is God, so there is no blasphemy. In the Antichrist's case, in his appointed time he will make a claim to deity; however, he is NOT God, so his claim is sheer blasphemy!

Concerning the seven heads, ten horns and the diadems, we need to remember that Revelation is a book communicating ("signifying" Rev 1:1 KJV) truth through signs and symbols, the interpretation of which is found either in Revelation itself or by means of how those signs and symbols are used elsewhere in the Bible. To gain a better understanding of what the seven heads and ten horns mean, we turn to the book of Daniel. It is in the past that we find the understanding of what will transpire in the near future.

In Daniel chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had extreme anxiety from a dream, and wanted to know its true meaning. He called for his wise men who tried to coax him into telling what the dream was so they could "interpret" it. However, he was no fool. He realized that if they couldn't even tell him the dream itself, he could have no faith their interpretation was the right one. He told them "that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is only one decree for

you. For you have agreed together to speak lying and corrupt words before me until the situation is changed." (Daniel 2:9).

When they finally admitted they could not tell him the dream, he ordered the deaths of all his "wise" men. Since this decree meant death for Daniel and his three Hebrew friends too, they prayed to God for help. God answered by giving Daniel both the dream and the interpretation to spare Daniel and his three friends from death.

"You, O king, were looking and behold, there was a single great statue; that statue, which was large and of extraordinary splendor, was standing in front of you, and its appearance was awesome. The head of that statue was made of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the earth. This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king." (Daniel 2:31-36).

Daniel relates a dream of an awesome statue: head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet a mixture of iron and clay. Bible scholars have observed that from head to foot, the materials of the statue start with the greatest value, and descend in material value. Also, gold is the densest and heaviest, whereas clay is the least dense and heavy. Moreover, even as the materials go down in value and density, they also decrease in malleability. Gold has the greatest sheen and luster; clay has the least. Pure gold is the most valuable of the statue's materials, but it is the softest metal with the greatest malleability, bending, molding and shaping itself under blows and pressure so easily that it has been beaten by scientists into sheets only a few molecules thick. Gold's beauty makes it wonderful for jewelry, but it is typically mixed with other metals because it bends too easily. Silver is the next material in the statue. It is not as valuable as gold, but it is somewhat harder and not as malleable. People enjoy its beauty and luster, and make of it jewelry as well as silverware for the dinner table.

The next statue material was bronze; while not as valuable as gold or silver, it nonetheless could be made to shine well enough that ancient people made mirrors of it. Moreover, more serious tools could be made from it, including weapons of warfare like swords and shields. Iron followed bronze in the statue; while of even less value as a material for beauty and luster (i.e. you don't hear much about iron jewelry), it has extreme strength, and is useful for tools to break stone, such as hammers and chisels, and makes superior weapons for swords and shields. While gold was easily malleable, iron scarcely bends into useful shapes unless a blacksmith heats and hammers it. Lastly, clay is the least valuable material. While iron can be shaped with some difficulty, clay, once it is made into pottery, has absolutely no malleability to further bending or shaping. Attempts to remake its shape result in the clay shattering.

The final stage of the statue is a mixture of iron and clay. Iron has strength, but clay has brittleness, and just as oil and water do not mix, iron and clay do not mix together, as they tend

to keep to themselves, iron with iron, and clay with clay. The mixture shown in the statue is a picture of a forced cohesion that doesn't hold together naturally.

"You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory; and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold." (Daniel 2:37-38).

Ahh, now we come to the reason why Nebuchadnezzar was so anxious about this particular dream, and why he had to know the true meaning of it, and would not be put off by the usual antics of his wise men. I am sure he would often take the prognostications and interpretations of his wise men, as the saying goes, "with a grain of salt." But, not this time! Daniel told the king that he, Nebuchadnezzar, was the head of gold. While the Scriptures do not explicitly say it, it is not unreasonable to understand the face portrayed on that statue was that of Nebuchadnezzar himself; then it makes sense why he would feel a terrible anxiety over this statue being so dramatically portrayed and then destroyed! He could not, and would not, settle for the usual astrological shenanigans. This was too important, and he had to know the real explanation of it! So, we see that the head here is a symbol of a kingdom ruled by Nebuchadnezzar.

"After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth." (Daniel 2:39).

The silver represents a kingdom that would follow Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar did NOT like that! Indeed, in the very next chapter of Daniel, the story is told of a gigantic statue of gold that Nebuchadnezzar had built with orders issued that at the sound of many musical instruments; all peoples were to bow and worship it. The king's idea was that his kingdom would not be followed by others of silver, bronze, iron and clay, but that his kingdom of gold would always be the only kingdom, and hence he built a statue entirely of gold (not just the head.) Nevertheless, in Daniel chapters 3 and 4, God humbled that proud king, and Nebuchadnezzar finally bowed his knees and heart to the true God Most High. I believe that Nebuchadnezzar is awaiting us in heaven!

It is a fact of history that Babylon was succeeded by the empire of the Medes and Persians. They were the kingdom of silver, with the prophetic statue's two arms representing dual rulership, one arm for the Medes, and the other arm for the Persians. Then another kingdom followed them in bronze, the kingdom of Greece.

"Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all those pieces." (Dan 2:40).

History shows us the fourth kingdom was the Roman Empire. Rome indeed ruled with an iron fist across its vast empire. The statue's two legs of iron show that the empire split into its Western and Eastern divisions (around A.D. 364.)

"In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed in with common clay. As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the

kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle. And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery." (Daniel 2:41-43).

Someone might say, "It is all well and good to speak of past empires, but what's in it for me here and now, meaning, today?" The answer is that this last part of the statue prophecy is where the past gives us the key to the future for us, here and now, meaning, today. This fifth kingdom with the feet and toes mixed of iron and clay will be the empire over which the Antichrist will reign. The differing metals of the overall statue showed empires built up from specific people groups. Gold was the Babylonians; silver the Medes and Persians; bronze the Greeks, and iron the Romans out of Rome, Italy.

The fifth kingdom, being still iron, will therefore arise out of the original Roman Empire. Bible scholars call it the "Revived Roman Empire." However, the mixing in of clay adds a new element to this last empire. The Antichrist's empire will have some of the Roman Empire's strength to rule with an iron fist, but also it will have some difficulty "getting its act together." It will be an empire where unity is artificial. The original Romans were essentially of one people and blood. In contrast, this Revived Roman Empire will include not only Italy, but will have other national people groups involved as well. The phrase "they will combine with one another in the seed of men" means the national people groups will interact and even intermarry, yet the phrase "but they will not adhere to one another" means the people groups, though joined together in an empire, will keep their separate national identities.

It bears mentioning that we have, as of this writing, such an empire already in existence, the European Union. It has some strength, like iron; yet, it has some brittleness like clay, too. Its peoples have cross-border freedom in travel and commerce, being all citizens, yet the member states retain their separate national identities. This does not mean that the EU is necessarily the final world empire, for the EU might be replaced by some other political iron-and-clay union that might yet spring up in the future.

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all those kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Daniel 2:44-45).

The stone cut without hands is Jesus Christ. The fact it strikes the feet shows His coming will be in the days of that fifth empire. When the stone smashes to dust all the previous materials of the statue, it shows us that the kingdoms of men will all be swept away, and only the kingdom of God will remain, and that forever.

Returning to Revelation 13, the image of the dragon is that it has seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems. These reveal that the dragon, Satan, rules politically (i.e. the seven diadems) throughout seven empires of man. The statue reveals five of these empires, the first two being previous to Nebuchadnezzar's day. The Beast, the Antichrist, also has seven heads, which points

to him having Satan's total political authority to rule an empire; the craft and power of Satan used in running previous world empires will be given to Antichrist to run the final, seventh empire of man.

The matter of the ten horns needs a word or two. In Scripture, the horn represents power and strength (Psalm 18:2), but it also denotes kings in their strength and power. In another prophecy in Daniel chapter 8, the prophet sees a representation of the dual rulership of the Medo-Persian empire as a ram with two horns (Daniel 8:3). The two horns represent the kings of the Medes and the Persians (Daniel 8:20), one horn for the Medes and one horn for the Persians. Then that same vision tells us of a male goat with a single horn, a representation of the Grecian empire (Daniel 8:21) under one mighty king, Alexander the Great. In the prophetic vision, the male goat attacked and defeated the ram, and trampled it into the ground. In the vision, the goat's one horn broke off, and four horns took its place (Daniel 8:8). We know from history that Alexander died without an heir, so his empire was divided up among his four generals (Daniel 8:22) into four parts: Thrace, Macedonia, Syria and Egypt.

So, while using heads in Revelation denotes empires, the imagery of using horns represents individual kings. The dragon and the Beast have ten horns each, and the statue has ten toes. This prophetic imagery points to the fifth empire being headed up by ten kings (or modern equivalent rulers, such as presidents, prime ministers, etc.) over whom Satan and the Antichrist will rule. It should be noted that the vast European Union, whose nation membership exceeds two dozen nations, had an inner core group of nations called the Western European Union (WEU), and this inner core group had exactly ten nation members, Italy (containing Rome) being one of them. While this 10-nation group was disbanded in 2011, there certainly will come another 10-nation group at some point to become the last of the "seven heads." The inescapable implication is that we, today, are the generation that will see the Second Coming of Christ. It is something to think about.

Some people have objected to identifying current world events as possible prophetic fulfillments; they point out that sincere people during World War II thought Hitler of Germany was the Antichrist and Mussolini of Italy was the false Prophet. However, in answer to this objection, there was at that time no nation of Israel, nor a temple, nor Two Witnesses, nor 144,000 evangelists from the twelve tribes of Israel, nor the Rapture, nor any Seals, Trumpets or Bowls. No, World War II was not the Tribulation, nor were Hitler and Mussolini the dreaded two accomplices of Satan. Ironically, despite the objections, that great war of nations did prepare the way for the rebirth of the nation of Israel so that the End-Times events could one day happen!

"And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority." (Revelation 13:2).

To understand these references to animals, we need to again go to the book of Daniel. In chapter 7, Daniel has a vision that is parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue, and the interpretation is the same. The main difference is that, while we see the same five world empires, a great deal more information is given about the last one, the empire of the Antichrist.

"The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind was also given to it." (Daniel 7:4).

Just as gold is the metal of kings, so the lion is the "king of the beasts." This is Nebuchadnezzar. God humbled his pride in Daniel chapter 4 with a seven years long period of madness in which he took on some characteristics of an eagle (Daniel 4:32-33). Then God restored his mind afterward (Daniel 4:34-37). The imagery in Rev 13:2 of the Antichrist-beast's mouth of a lion is drawn from this passage in Daniel.

"And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth and they said to it, 'Arose, devour much meat.'" (Daniel 7:5).

This bear is the Medo-Persian Empire. Its being raised up on one side showed that one of the partners, the Persians, was in a higher position in the alliance than the Medes. The three ribs indicate the empire went conquering in three primary directions, which is what history shows happened. The Medo-Persian Empire was slow-moving but a powerful predator like a bear, and this is whence the Antichrist-beast gets its feet like a bear.

"After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it." (Daniel 7:6).

This is the Grecian empire under Alexander the Great. Unlike the bear, the leopard is a fast-moving predator. Alexander moved his armies speedily, and came upon enemy forces before they knew they were in danger. The four wings show still more speed, like a bird swift on the wing as compared to merely running on the ground. The four heads refer again to the four generals who inherited Alexander's empire: Cassander got Macedonia, Ptolemy got Egypt, Lysimachus got Asia Minor, and Seleucus got Syria. This prophetic imagery of a four-headed leopard gives the Antichrist beast his body "like a leopard."

Combining these bestial images together, we find the Antichrist speaks royally like a lion, has strength like a bear, and strikes quickly like a leopard. This is possible because the dragon, Satan, "gave him his power and his throne and great authority."

"I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; they worshipped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?'" (Revelation 13:3-4).

We are told three times in Revelation chapter 13 (verses 3, 12, and 14) that the beast receives a fatal wound, but is healed. A pastor friend of mine once told me that when the Word of God tells you something three times in the same chapter, you had better sit up and take notice. It seems that an assassination attempt will be made upon the Antichrist, and would certainly seem to have been successful; yet, his "fatal wound" will be healed, and the Antichrist will come back to life, astonishing the world. We saw earlier that Satan will be imitating the Trinity. Just as Jesus the

true Christ died, and came back to life by resurrection, so the Beast, being the false Christ, will also come back to life in imitation. This assassination and return to life again, will probably happen around the time of the Abomination of Desolation, and indeed, it may well be that the Abomination of Desolation occurs immediately after the die-and-live-again experience of the Beast. No wonder so many will agree to worship him! He will have died and risen again, and will walk into God's temple and declare himself to be God. It's not everyday someone rises from the dead in front of live television cameras. Belief in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings eternal life, whereas belief in the death and life of the devilish Antichrist brings eternal damnation.

The world will swallow it, "hook, line and sinker," as the fisherman's saying goes. They will be amazed, and will worship the dragon. Think of it and shudder: the whole world filled with devil worshippers! By the time of the Abomination of Desolation, people will know Satan is the authority behind the Antichrist, and knowing this, they will worship him! At last, Lucifer, the angel who would be God, who desired the worship that was coming to God, who rebelled and schemed and plotted, and who conceived violence and murder in his heart toward his Creator, that very same Satan will at last have the worship he has so craved all these ages! Because the Antichrist is the dragon's "son" in the "unholy trinity," he is worshipped too.

Back in Revelation 6, we saw the breaking of the second Seal which unleashed a new World War, a nuclear war, and we saw that a great deal of the death and destruction is likely at the hands of the Antichrist. Here, the people gladly cry out in amazement and worship, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" With Satan's power, throne and authority, Antichrist is invincible. Scripture tells us of how the Antichrist comes to power with Satan's assistance and empowerment:

"That is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10).

The empowerment Satan gives Antichrist reaches its apex at the middle of the 70th Week at the Abomination of Desolation.

"There was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (Revelation 13:5-8).

To understand this, we will again return to the prophecy in Daniel chapter 7 where we saw the beasts rising from the sea. As with the vision of the statue, there is a beast corresponding to the statue's iron legs.

"After this I kept looking in the night vision, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the

remainder with its feet, and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns." (Daniel 7:7).

The iron-fisted Roman Empire was this fourth beast with its large iron teeth, and it utterly outmatched the previous empires as "it devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder." Here, too, we see ten horns, which we already know to be ten rulers in the coming Revived Roman Empire of the Antichrist.

"While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eye like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts." (Daniel 7:8).

The sequence of time indicated here, I believe, is that the empire of the ten horns is already in place before the Antichrist comes. This is shown by the Scripture saying, "another horn...came up among them"; hence, they would have to have already been in place first, all ten of them, before Antichrist could be revealed to the world. This next horn is different in that it is "little." The meaning is that while the other ten horns represent ten rulers of ten kingdoms, this "little" horn seems to be a ruler who has no kingdom. Yet, the little horn successfully "pulls out by the roots" three other horns of the ten. The Antichrist, in his rise to power, may well be opposed by three of the ten rulers, and he will overthrow them. The little horn is a man, and a braggart. Daniel wanted to know more (and we do, too.)

"Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them." (Daniel 7:19-21).

We get two additional pieces about the fourth beast. First, it had claws of bronze. In the vision of the statue, the iron legs (Rome) were preceded by a bronze belly and thighs (Greece). Somehow, Greece was to be involved in the original Roman empire. In fact, koine Greek was the common language of the Roman empire; indeed, this made spreading the gospel easier, and most of the New Testament was written in koine Greek.

The second new information was that in regard to the Revived Roman Empire, although the "11th" horn was little starting out, once it overthrew the three others, it became "larger in appearance." This may mean once the Antichrist overthrows those three rulers, he will be the ruler, personally, of those three nations, and hence his horn is "larger in appearance than its associates."

As we saw in Revelation 12, after the Abomination of Desolation and his unsuccessful bid to destroy Israel, the Antichrist will wage war against those who have believed in Jesus. What is chilling here is the exact parallel between Revelation 13:7 saying, "it was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them," and Daniel 7:21 saying, "and that horn was

waging war with the saints and overpowering them." It means he will win against them. Many will die, as we saw in the fifth Seal in Revelation 6 with the martyred souls under the altar crying out to God for vengeance.

Daniel was then told:

"As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times and half a time." (Daniel 7:24-25).

Here we are told that the ten kings will arise out of the original Roman Empire, and another will arise after them. As we said earlier, before the Antichrist can come, there have to already be in place those ten kings. If the European Union is not the last world empire, then some other empire will arise. Only time will tell if it is the EU, or still some other empire yet to arise.

Antichrist's war against God's saints (i.e. those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ after the Pre-Trib Rapture has removed all the Christians) is for "a time, times and half a time." We already saw in Revelation 12 that "a time, times and half a time" is 1260 days (Revelation 12:6, 14). This "time, times and half a time" is the same as described in Revelation 13 where it says "authority to act for 42 months was given to him." These 3-1/2 years are the second half of the Tribulation period, right after the Abomination of Desolation where the Antichrist "opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name" (Revelation 13:6). Interestingly, Antichrist also blasphemes God's "tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven." Since he can't do physical harm to them, he blasphemes them.

Revelation 13:7 then says, "It was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them." Again, this happens in the second half of the Tribulation period. This verse, by the way, is proof the Mid-Trib Rapture viewpoint (i.e. the Rapture occurs in the middle of the seven years) is not valid. When the Rapture occurs, all of God's saints will be literally removed from planet Earth. Against whom, then, would the Antichrist wage war? For if the Rapture were in the middle of the seven years, meaning about the time of the Abomination of Desolation, there would be no longer be anywhere on earth any saints of God upon whom he could make war so he could kill them. The worst he could do would be to blaspheme them in their safe abode with Jesus in heaven. When we get to Revelation 20, we shall see a more comprehensive reason why only the Pre-Trib Rapture can be correct, and why the Mid-Trib, Pre-Wrath and Post-Trib Rapture positions are not valid.

Antichrist receives absolute authority for the second half of the Tribulation period: "...and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him." His authority will be a nightmare for anyone who is a saint of God, for he will kill those he finds.

"If anyone has an ear, let him hear." (Revelation 13:9).

At the end of each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, there is found the admonition: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Here in Revelation 13, that same expression is used again, but is missing "what the Spirit says to the churches." The reason for this omission is simple: the Church has already been Raptured out before this point in time (i.e. the middle point of the 7 years of the 70th Week). Therefore, the seven churches are not present for the Holy Spirit to say anything to them. This, too, shows the Rapture is Pre-Trib; it also shows why the Mid-Trib, Pre-Wrath and Post-Trib views are not valid--there is only one Rapture, and it has already happened by the time the Antichrist goes out to make war on the saints. The saints against whom he wars are those who came to faith in Jesus the Messiah after the Pre-Trib Rapture at the preaching of the 144,000 (Revelation 7:1-8).

Now there follows that critically important message that anyone who "has an ear" is supposed to hear.

"If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and faith of the saints." (Revelation 13:10).

Remember the martyrs under the altar that we saw in the fifth Seal? This is a word about God's will for the people who will become those martyrs. (Reader, if you are reading this writing after the Rapture has already happened, please read this very seriously!) If God has destined anyone to be among those who are captured, then he will be captured. If God wills that such a one die, God's will is that he does not resist being murdered. In Revelation 6:11, it warns that "the number of their fellow servants, and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been" needed to be completed. God has ordained that many will die for their faith during the Antichrist's 42 month reign of terror, but they WILL be avenged!

God warns, though, that "if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." This means, don't gather up guns and knives and dig in a foxhole or bunker and fight to kill the Antichrist's forces when they come to take you away. Don't do it! Let them take you, for if God has ordained you for captivity, you will go into captivity. Being willing to lay down your life for Christ is what is meant by "here is the perseverance and faith of the saints." (vs. 10).

James wrote:

"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." (James 1:12).

But, if you kill someone coming for you, then God's ancient command of the death penalty applies to you. God ordained and instituted the death penalty after the Flood:

"Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." (Genesis 9:6).

Jesus repeated and reaffirmed the death penalty:

"For all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52b).

Then here again in Revelation, that ancient ordinance is repeated yet again:

"If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." (Revelation 13:10b).

So, if you are reading this after the Rapture, what shall you do?

If you can successfully hide from the Antichrist, yes, do so, as best as you can. If they find you, don't kill his followers, but surrender your life into God's hands.

Friend, if you are reading this before the Rapture and Tribulation begin, and you don't know for certain whether you are saved, now would be a very good time to trust Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

"for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.

Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold now is the acceptable day.'" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

The door to eternal life is open, and with it freedom from all the terrors and horrors of the seven years of the Tribulation. Be wise. Humble your heart. Choose Jesus Christ.

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed." (Revelation 13:11-12).

Until now, we have seen Satan, the "unholy father" in his "unholy trinity"; and we have seen the Antichrist, his "unholy son"; now we see his "unholy spirit" of the "unholy trinity," the False Prophet. He is called "another beast," and comes up "out of the earth" rather than "out of the sea" like the Antichrist (vs. 1). The promises made to Israel by God revolve around the land of Israel given to Abram (Abraham):

"On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the Euphrates.'" (Genesis 15:18).

Again, God promised:

"I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." (Genesis 17:8).

Therefore, when the second beast comes up from the earth, this means the False Prophet comes up out of the land of Israel. Moreover, the False Prophet has two horns like a lamb. As shown earlier, everything from Revelation 4:1 and after has a Jewish style, flavor and nature. The lamb is a symbol to the sons of Israel, recalling the Passover Lamb. A lamb is innocent, so it is likely that the False Prophet is a respectable, innocent-seeming Jewish rabbi whom the modern Jews would trust, who proclaims that the Messiah has come; however, the "Messiah" this False Prophet points the people to is none other than the first Beast, the Antichrist.

Speaking of Satan, Jesus said:

"Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44b).

So, when this second beast speaks "as a dragon," he lies! He exercises all the authority of the Antichrist, who himself received his authority directly from Satan (vs. 2).

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to direct men's hearts to Jesus Christ:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26).

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me." (John 15:26).

Just as the Holy Spirit directs men to worship Jesus Christ, so the second beast, the False Prophet, shall imitate the Spirit's role by directing men to worship the Antichrist (Rev 13:12b).

"He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs, which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed." (Revelation 13:13-15).

This passage ought to sound a warning bell loud and clear: do not assume a miracle or other supernatural occurrence is automatically a sign of God's hand! Jesus warned, "many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." (Matthew 24:11).

Jesus also warned:

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

Pentecostals and Charismatics, listen well! Miracles are NOT an automatic sign of the leading of the Holy Spirit! Someone can be prophesying, casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and even performing miracles, but not be saved! Jesus says to them, "I never knew you." Why would these things not be a sign of salvation? The answer is simple. We are saved by faith, not works (Eph 2:8-9), by what we believe, not by what we do (Rom 4:4-5). Note that the people to whom Jesus gives the warning are all trying to justify themselves before God with what they are doing (i.e. works), not with what they are believing (i.e. faith).

Peter also warned us:

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of the truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you; whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." (2 Peter 2:1-3, KJV).

One of the signs of a false teacher who secretly (privily) brings in heresies is that because of covetousness he "makes merchandise of you." That is, he gets you to make donations so that he can live in mansions, fly his own private jet, have extensive and expensive jewelry--in short, make merchandise of you, to take you for all the money he can get out of you. Leaders who live

lavish and rich lifestyles out of the donations to their ministries are, well, as Jesus said, you shall know the tree by its fruit.

Anyone who proclaims the expression "slain in the Spirit" is preaching heresy! Beware!

The Apostle Paul warned:

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in the later times some will fall away from the truth, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars, seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." (1 Timothy 4:1-2).

"Slain in the spirit" is a doctrine of demons, and anyone who promotes it or any other teachings like it (i.e. holy laughter), is a hypocrite and a liar, one who has seared his own conscience like with a branding iron, so that he won't feel guilty about promoting such spiritual garbage in order to collect donations so he can live "high off the hog."

We are to test the spirits:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirit to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1).

So, again I warn you, miracles are no guarantee that God is present. Test the spirits (and the teachers). Use the Word of God.

"Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

Be like the Bereans who investigated what they were taught:

"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11).

Miracles or supernatural events alone do not prove truth claims. Test them by the Word of God!

The devilish False Prophet performs great signs, and even "makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men." He so thoroughly deceives people, that he has them build an image of the Antichrist, and makes it come to life. People in previous centuries used to wonder how on earth this could happen. Considering modern computer graphics being used more and more in motion pictures for "special effects", it may be that this prophesied image of Antichrist is a computer-generated, lifelike video image of Antichrist. To previous generations, this would have been incredible and beyond their imagination--to them, nothing like this was possible. To us, though, it is everyday technology, so it's no big deal--we see lifelike video images all the time nowadays. What is terrible about the prophecy in Revelation about making an image come to life is that the second beast causes the image to "speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed." (vs. 15b).

Better to trust Christ now and be in the Rapture!

"And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the freemen and the slaves, to be given a mark on the right hand or on the forehead, and he provides that no one will be able to buy or sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six." (Rev 13:16-18).

For centuries, men have tried to understand this passage concerning the number 666. It is almost certain the worldwide control of commerce will be by computer. Everyone will be required to have an ID number to participate. In and of itself, this is not a bad idea. It could cut down on crime tremendously, for no one would carry cash. The problem here is that there is a "catch." By accepting the 666 ID, you also choose the Antichrist as your God. In Rev 7:1-2, we saw the "seal of the living God" on the foreheads of His servants. Here, we see the seal of the devil, 666, on either the forehead or the right hand. Those on earth must choose one or the other: be sealed with God, or be sealed with the Devil.

The mystery of the 666 mark can possibly be explained by the use of a bar code or RFID, or some other technology that would uniquely ID a person. Right now, as of this writing, the "666" number is already embedded in the UPC bar code we see on virtually all products on store shelves. There are two thin lines at the start, the same pair in the center, and again the same pair at the end. This "guard" set of bars are identical to the pair used for the number "6".

However, as of the time of this writing, the bar code is NOT the devil's mark, not as long as no one requires that you place it on your right hand or forehead, and worship the Antichrist (vs. 16). It is, nonetheless, an indication of the possibilities of technology available, right now, to permit the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Time is growing shorter. No one (this author included) can tell you just how close the Rapture and Tribulation are. Warning flags are going up everywhere that the End-Times are rapidly approaching, but we might have a little time yet--maybe.

Yet, tomorrow is guaranteed to no one (including me). By illness, accident, crimes, or any of a thousand or more ways, death can come knocking at our door at any time. Are you ready to give an account of yourself before God?

"Do homage to the Son, that he not become angry, and you perish in the way. For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him." (Psalm 2:12).

I urge you. Take refuge in Jesus today. You'll be glad you did.

Chapter Fourteen

"Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." (Revelation 14:1).

This chapter is again another parenthetical chapter, when need-to-know information is presented out of time with the sequence of the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls judgments. We first saw the 144,000 in Rev. 7:1-8, where the angel of God sealed their foreheads with the seal of God. While we saw the fruit of their labor in Rev. 7:9-17 (a great multitude saved out of every nation, tribe, people and tongue), we were left with the question of what ever happened to those 144,000?

Here in Revelation 14, our hearts are laid to rest as to this question. We see them with Jesus, the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion. Zion is a mountain of Jerusalem and it includes not only Jerusalem, but also Bethlehem, the city of David (1 Kings 8:1; Luke 2:11). Zion is also synonymous with the place the Lord God calls His home and those He calls His people. (Psalm 2:6; 9:11; 48:11-13; 102:21; 137:3-6; Isaiah 10:24; 30:10; 33:20-21; 52:1). It is because we see the 144,000 with Jesus that we know this is a parenthetical chapter, for Jesus Christ does not physically return to planet earth until the end of the Tribulation's seven years as we shall see in Rev. 19:11; hence, we are being given a glimpse at something that, with regard to the seven years countdown, hasn't happened yet, a "parenthesis."

We saw in Rev. 7 that the 144,000 had the seal of God on their foreheads. Here we are told the nature of that seal; it is the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father. This is in contrast to the devil's seal, the Antichrist's 666 Mark, which we were told is "either the name of the beast or the number of his name." (Rev 13:17b). The 70th Week, also known as the Tribulation period, is a time of contrasts like this as Good and Evil strive for the souls of men. Good strives to free and save men's souls; Evil strives to enslave and destroy men's souls. The use of seals is a sign of ownership; it comes down to declaring your allegiance. Will you side with the true Holy Trinity, or with the false "unholy trinity?" There will be no religious fence-sitting. God or Satan, one side or the other: you choose. To fail to choose God through Jesus is to choose Satan!

It is a joy-inspiring thought to see that the souls saved during the Tribulation through the ministry of the 144,000 is "a great multitude which no one could count." (Rev 7:9a). Yet, it is chilling that other multitudes choose the 666 Mark, "all who dwell on the earth...everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (Rev 13:8).

"And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth." (Rev 14:2-3).

A voice comes from heaven. Whose voice is it? We are told it is "like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder." In Revelation 1, we are told concerning Jesus that "His

voice was like the sound of many waters." Of course, Jesus is God; however, this voice is not that of Jesus, because He is already standing at this point with the 144,000 on Mount Zion, whereas the voice comes down out of heaven. There is, however, another voice out of heaven that sounds like thunder. During His time on earth, when before a crowd, Jesus said: "'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' So the crowd of people who stood nearby and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.'" (John 12:28-29).

It most certainly seems this voice, then, is the voice of God the Father. What I find to be amazing is that this voice of the Father is musical, "like the sound of harpists playing on their harps." Music and songs are a gift from God to the sons of men. Should any of us be so amazed to find out God loves music and songs, and can put the beauty and joy of music in His voice? At the sound of His voice, the 144,000 "sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders." The 144,000 were previously on Mount Zion; now they sing their song before God's throne in the presence of God and the four living creatures and before the Raptured Church (seen here as the 24 elders).

An interesting point is that this song is for the 144,000 alone to sing, for "no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand." The song they sing is a song of redemption. There is no one who can understand you like someone who has experienced what you have experienced. No one understands the horrors of battle, bloodshed and death that a soldier has experienced, except another soldier who has experienced the same. The 144,000 had a unique role in serving Jesus Christ in the seven years of the Tribulation, so no one can learn their special song unless they themselves were veterans of the same spiritual battle they had fought. Yes, these 144,000 were "purchased from the earth" by the blood of the Lamb, and they in turn served Jesus with extraordinary dedication and zeal for those harrowing years.

"These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless." (Revelation 14:4-5).

These 144,000 offered pure service to the Lamb, and they did so by not getting side-tracked by marriage. They have kept themselves "chaste," which is the Greek "parthenos," a virgin, meaning an unmarried person.

The Apostle Paul wrote to his young protégé Timothy: "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

Certainly, the apostles and other church leaders did have a right to marry, as Paul the Apostle pointed out.

"Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" (1 Corinthians 9:5).

Please note that this is contrary to a denomination that forbids marriage to its priests and nuns. In fact, to forbid marriage is identified by Paul as nothing less than "paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"!

"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage." (1 Timothy 4:1-2a).

The text says of the 144,000 that they "have not been defiled with women." This is not saying that to have a wife is vile and that marriage is to be avoided. The Word of God rather teaches us: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD." (Proverbs 18:22) "House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD." (Proverbs 19:14)

Moreover, one of the books of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, is entirely devoted to praising marriage. Also, we are told in the letter to the Hebrews:

"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Hebrews 13: 4).

In contrasting Revelation and Hebrews in English, we have at first glance two words, "defile/undefiled" which seem to be equal but opposite words. However, the underlying Greek words are entirely different words. The usage in the Hebrews passage, "un-defiled," speaks of purity, not being contaminated in a moral sense, but the Revelation usage means "soiled," as in being spotted with black. Hence, In Revelation 14, being "defiled" with women means to have spots that interrupt something unblemished. By following Christ as unmarried virgins, their service is unblemished by other things. This falls in line with what Paul the apostle wrote:

"But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided." (1 Corinthians 7:32-34a).

The 144,000 opted to not enter into marriage, so they could completely and fully serve Jesus. Their interests were undivided as they followed their Messiah with all their hearts.

Earlier in both Revelation chapters 7 and 11, we said the 144,000 were the first ones saved out of the Tribulation through the ministry of the Testimony of the Two Witnesses. Here that point is corroborated when it says, "these have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb." In Israel, agriculture was a vital and integral part of life. When God led Israel by Moses out of Egypt, He instituted seven great feast days, recorded for us in Leviticus chapter 23. In particular we want to look at the following:

"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.'" (Leviticus 23:10-11).

God wanted Israel to know that the first portion of the great harvest to follow was His. In the Tribulation, there would be a great harvest of souls saved out of the seven years of Daniel's 70th Week; God had claimed for Himself the 144,000 as His "first fruits" of that harvest of souls.

The 144,000 followed the Lamb so completely with such unsoiled devotion, it is testified of them that "no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless."

"And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.' (Revelation 14:6-7).

Here is another parenthetical passage. The gospel will go out to all peoples everywhere: to Israel, by the Two Witnesses; to the nations, by the 144,000; to everyone else, such as those living in remote or inaccessible areas (including astronauts in space, should any be "out there" when this happens), by this messenger.

Jesus said:

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14).

Every soul on the planet will hear of Jesus Christ. As we shall see later in Revelation 20, this happens before the middle of the Tribulation period.

"And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.'" (Revelation 14:8).

In this parenthesis section, Babylon, we are told, is "fallen." Throughout the centuries, Babylon has been a byword and symbol of idolatry, of man raising up himself against the true knowledge of God. It started with the original Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) and it will culminate in Revelation chapters 16, 17 and 18, which we shall look at in more detail later.

"Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he will also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day or night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.' Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!"' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" (Revelation 14:9-13).

In Revelation chapter 13, we saw the infamous 666 Mark. Here, in this parenthetical passage, a warning goes out following the previous two angels (one with the gospel and the other proclaiming Babylon's fall); the message warns against accepting the 666 Mark: if you take it, you will be damned for all eternity. Now, it is of interest to note that there are some who believe that the unbeliever ceases to exist in hell and that damnation is annihilation. One such group is the Watchtower Society cult, also known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. This passage shows the annihilation teaching is not valid.

Notice the damned are "tormented with fire and brimstone." The word "tormented" is the Greek "basanizo" which according to Strong's means "to torture"; pain, toil, torment, toss, vex. None of these give any possibility of cessation of existence; quite to the contrary, they indicate a description of pain in a person having consciousness. Moreover, it says "the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever." Again, some have said, "Well, the unbeliever is annihilated; it's just that the smoke of that which destroyed them goes up forever and ever." The truth is, only someone desperate to avoid or deny the facts would twist and distort that sentence to mean that. It doesn't say the smoke of their "fire" goes up forever; it says the smoke of their "torment" (meaning, their consciously experienced pain) goes up forever.

The reason someone would be desperate to avoid it, is that Hell scares some people terribly. (Point of fact: if you suspect, fear, think or know you are going to Hell, you OUGHT to be scared of it, and take Christ as your Savior to be saved from it.) Rather than face their fears, they do anything, even to bend and twist and distort the Scriptures to mean something other than what it plainly says. This objection is not worthy of further rebuttal, for in addition to the fact that "torment" (Greek: basanizo) does not have any possible meaning of annihilation, the phrase that follows it proves continued existence when it says, "they have no rest day and night." (Rev 14:11b). An annihilated person would not, could not, have an issue of resting or not resting, for they would not exist anymore. An existing conscious person, on the other hand, would have an issue with being unable to rest day and night.

With that warning of eternal damnation for any and all who accept the 666 Mark, the believers during the seven years are again encouraged to keep "the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." As we saw in Rev. 13, the Antichrist's forces will wage war on the saints, overcome, and kill them. We saw the perseverance of the saints means the willingness to stay faithful to Jesus Christ, even if it means having to die for Him. Here again in Rev. 14, that same reality is driven home: do not take the Mark! Persevere, even if you must die for it! A blessing is given for those who die accordingly for Jesus, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." (vs. 13.) Another contrast between Good and Evil occurs here. The doomed dead "have no rest day and night;" the faithful dead, however, "rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' Then He who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped." (Revelation 14:14-15).

Remembering that after the Church Age, Revelation has a Jewish style, flavor and nature, here we have a parenthetical passage where we see Jesus again, but in His role as "the Son of Man" as prophesied to Israel through the prophet Daniel. God the Father is seen as the "Ancient of Days" (Dan 7:9). Then Jesus is shown:

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him." (Daniel 7:13).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus was on trial before the religious rulers, who put Him on oath to tell them who He was.

"But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.'" (Matthew 26:63-64).

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus identified Himself as the prophesied Son of Man described in Daniel. Here in Revelation 14, He is portrayed sitting on a cloud with a golden crown. The Greek for "crown" is "stephanos", and it means a victor's crown (as contrasted with a diadem, a crown of political power). This golden crown shows that Jesus won the victory when He overcame sin at the cross, and death at the resurrection. His victory means He is qualified as our Savior to save us from our sins and to resurrect us from death. He has a sickle, a tool for harvesting grain. The agricultural symbol of grain and harvest are for souls needing to be saved.

Back when He was on earth, when He had been talking with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-30), Jesus taught His disciples about the Samaritans using the imagery of a harvest. I have been told that a field of ripe wheat is a golden brown color when it is at its ripest best; however, if the farmer does not reap the wheat at that time, it turns white. At that point, it MUST be harvested, or else the grain will spoil and the crop will be lost. With this in mind, consider what Jesus was meaning when He then said:

"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?' Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." (John 4:35).

Like a field of overripe wheat, the Samaritans in that village needed to be saved, then and there, else they would be lost. Back in Revelation 14, the imagery of Jesus is that He is finishing the harvesting of souls from Earth unto salvation. It says, "and the earth was reaped." This means that the harvest is done. There are no more souls to be saved; all that will be saved, have now been saved. Furthermore, this passage lets us know that there will come a point during the seven years of the 70th Week where salvation stops, and no more people get saved. I believe the "earth was reaped" cut-off point, after which no one else gets saved, is the middle of the Tribulation. I will develop this more fully in Revelation 20 when we consider "Truths from the Year 3000."

"And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and

he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, 'Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles." (Revelation 14:17-20).

This incredible slaughter is also forebodingly told in the book of the prophet Joel:

"Proclaim this among the nations; prepare a war; rouse the mighty men! Let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up! Beat your plowshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am a mighty man.' Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there. Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones. Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; the vats overflow, for the wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision." (Joel 3:9-14).

The armies of the nations are going to assemble against modern Israel with the intent to annihilate the Jews, once and for all. Yet, it the Lord's doing, for He will be assembling them in order that He might smite them. This will be none other than the battle of Armageddon! The slaughter will be so intense, the blood will flow as deep as the bridle of a horse. Reader, if you don't yet know for certain that you have forgiveness for your sins, there's no better time than now to settle things with God. Flee to Jesus! Else, you may one day be part of that great slaughter of the wrath of God, and beyond death, the torment of the fire of Hell.

Chapter Fifteen

"Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished." (Rev 15:1).

The parenthetical passages have, for now, ceased and our narrative returns to the countdown of the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls. John the Apostle sees another sign in heaven, "great and marvelous." The word for "great" is the Greek "megas", from which we get the very familiar word "mega." We have megabytes in our computers; wealthy people have megabucks; and our fearsome nuclear weapons have megatons. According to Strong's Concordance, "Megas" has a large variety of applicable meanings, including exceedingly, great, high and mighty.

This sign is "exceedingly, great, high and mighty!" Additionally, it is "marvelous," which according to Strong's is the Greek "thaumastos", or something that is "wondered" at, hence wonderful or marvelous. John sees seven angels with the seven last plagues. Since John has by this time seen uncountable multitudes of angels, it seems that the great wonder of this sign is not in the angels themselves, but in the seven plagues they hold, for we are told that "in them the wrath of God is finished."

The judgments of the Tribulation's seven years have been likened in Scripture to labor pangs in a woman with child giving birth. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described the future things found in the Seal judgments covered in Revelation 6.

"For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." (Matthew 24:5). This describes the first Seal, the rise of Antichrist.

"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end." (Matthew 24:6. This describes the second Seal, a great World War.

"...in various places there will be famines." (Matthew 24:7b). This describes the third Seal, famine.

Following these things, Jesus said:

"But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs." (Matthew 24:8).

The Apostle Paul also used the same metaphor about the End-Times:

"For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pangs upon a woman with child, and they will not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

As a side note, it should be noted that, as of the time of this writing, the world news media has already been reporting for some time now about how the governments are trying to achieve "peace and security" in the Middle East. If you look up the word "security," it means "safety." They are NOW saying, "peace and safety." Does it not make you wonder just how close we are to the fulfillment of all these things?

Now, concerning birth pangs, what do we know about them? They have at least two distinguishing marks. They start out relatively spaced apart in time, and relatively weak in the strength of their pain, but as the time for birth draws near, they increase in both their frequency and intensity, meaning the time duration between pangs grows shorter and each pang grows stronger.

The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls follow this pattern. The first four Seals happen during the first half of the 70th Week. The 5th Seal happens around the middle of the Week's seven years. Then the 6th and 7th Seals, all 7 Trumpets, and all 7 Bowls occur during the second half of the 70th week. This may seem "lop-sided," but it is in accordance with the pattern of birth pangs, that is, as birth draws near, the birth pangs come faster and faster, and stronger and stronger.

If the judgments of the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are birth pangs, then what do we understand the birth itself is? It is none other than the return of Jesus Christ, God's Messiah, to put an end to all rebellion of the nations so that He can usher in the Kingdom of God, establishing true peace, prosperity and righteousness across the world.

In keeping with the symbol of birth pangs, when John sees the seven angels having the last seven plagues, we therefore know these plagues are the strongest of them all. Moreover, when they occur, they will come in rapid-fire succession, one after the other. Contrast this with the first four Seals being spread out over 3-1/2 years, and we find these seven last plagues may only be days, or even hours apart from each other! These are "mega" plagues!

"And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed.'" (Revelation 15:2-4).

When John first entered heaven in this awesome prophecy, he saw God on His throne, "and before the throne itself there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal." The glass was like crystal then. Here, John sees "something like a sea of glass mixed with fire." I wondered at the contrast: first, crystal, then fire. When we look at Strong's Concordance, the Greek for "crystal" is "krustallos," which means "ice" (Strong's tells us that "krustallos" is derived from "kruos," which means "frost.")

Ice and fire, fire and ice -- Revelation has many contrasts. For instance, Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, "I wish you were cold or hot." Having seen this contrast concerning the sea of glass, let us dig a little deeper to understand it better.

Those who had been victorious over the beast (the Antichrist) are standing on the sea of glass. These people are the same ones as the souls of the martyrs from the 5th Seal in Rev. 6. We saw these same people again in Rev. 7 as "a great multitude...standing before the throne," of whom is

given the explanation that "these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

When John first entered heaven in vision, the sea of glass was cool and beautiful, but the redeemed martyrs were not there yet. Here in Rev. 15, we see them on the sea of glass, but instead of coolness like frost and ice, it has fire mixed in. Fire is sometimes used in Scripture to denote refining for purity.

God spoke to His people Israel:

"Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." (Isaiah 48:10).

Speaking of Jesus, the prophet Malachi says:

"But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness." (Malachi 3:2-3).

Peter wrote:

"In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The people standing on the sea of glass have been refined by the fire of the furnace of affliction, for they have come "out of the great tribulation." Moreover, they are refined like pure silver and gold, for "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Where the sea of glass was first like ice crystals, now it flashes with fire, the fire of refinement and purity.

Reader, because the time may be near for these prophecies to come true, some of those people may be people you already know right now, people who as yet do not know Jesus as their Savior. Might it be, reader, that perhaps you do not yet know Jesus? If so, are you one of those who will only believe with proof you can see with your own eyes, and once the headlines scream "MILLIONS VANISH!", then and only then will you believe? An old saying goes, "Better late than never," but I say, why wait?

I plead with you. Don't wait for the Rapture. Receive NOW the free gift of forgiveness for your sins that Jesus won for you at the cost of His own life. With the awe-shuddering death toll (1/4th of the Earth's population) that the first four Seals bring after the Rapture, you might not live long enough to become one of those on the sea of glass mixed with fire. Tomorrow is promised to no one. Behold, today is the day salvation beckons to you. Don't blow your chance to escape all these terrors coming upon the earth.

As said numerous times already, the seven years of Daniel's 70th Week are Jewish in style, flavor and nature. The people on the sea of glass hold harps of God and sing the song of Moses,

the bonds-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb "who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29). They praise God and His works. This chapter of Revelation opens with another sign "great and marvelous." Now the redeemed of the earth praise God's works as "great and marvelous." They are not singing about God's works in general, such as Creation, but being aware of the seven angels with the seven last plagues, they are praising God specifically for these seven last plagues.

Why would they do that?

Go back to Rev. 6, the 5th Seal. These people, as martyred souls under the altar, cried out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10). As the Seals and Trumpets have progressed, like birth pangs coming faster and stronger, that vengeance for which they cried has been getting satisfied. Now, with the last seven plagues, "the wrath of God is finished," and their blood will be fully avenged!

If anyone reads this is "squeamish" and thinks the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are cruel, think again. These victorious martyrs sing, "Righteous and true are Your ways." The Seals, Trumpets and Bowls are righteous and true. The people on earth on the receiving end of them deserve it!

"After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony was opened, and the seven angels who had the seven last plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels, seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with the smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished." (Revelation 15:5-8).

There is in this passage a strong correlation between the ancient instructions to Moses and the people of Israel to build for God a tabernacle, which was a tent used as a dwelling place. Extensive instructions were given in Exodus regarding the construction of the tabernacle.

"This is the number of the things for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were numbered according to the command of Moses, for the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest." (Exodus 38:21).

The testimony is the "Decalogue," also known as the Ten Commandments written on two tablets of stone (Deut. 10:1-4):

"When He had finished speaking with Him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." (Exodus 31:18).

The two tablets were placed inside the Ark, as told by Moses to the Israelites:

"Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets in the ark which I made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me." (Deuteronomy 10:5).

Earlier in Revelation, we saw the temple of God and the Ark (Rev 11:9). We are told in the letter to the Hebrews that the earthly tabernacle is but a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven, and the earthly priests are those "who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle." (Hebrews 8:5a).

Here in Revelation 15, we see, not the copy, but the true temple of God wherein are His tabernacle (His dwelling place) and the true Ark of His testimony (the Ten Commandments.) In the Holy of Holies in the earthly tabernacle, the holy presence of God himself dwelt among His people Israel. That same holy presence dwells in the true tabernacle in the temple of God. The seven angels with the last seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright with golden sashes. We saw Jesus similarly dressed in the first chapter, "and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across the chest with a golden sash." (Rev. 1:13).

The seven angels are dressed as authorized agents of God to carry out His will. One of the four living creatures give them seven bowls of the wrath of God.

This is it! This is the final outpouring of God's wrath on a rebellious human race. God's wrath gets so intense, smoke fills the temple. God's glory is His dignity, His honor and His worthiness to be praised and worshipped. He is eternal ("who lives forever and ever") and is infinitely worthy. The people on earth, all those who have worshipped the dragon and the Antichrist, have insulted Him and stolen His honor, for they have given to God's enemies the glory that is God's alone:

"My glory I will not give to another." (Isaiah 48:11b).

The rebellious people slaughtered without mercy God's redeemed ones; they killed people who turned from their sins in repentance to embrace the true and living God. So, not only have they spit in the face of God, so to speak, but they assaulted His family. On a human scale, when is a man more likely to react with utterly extreme wrath: when evil men attack him when he can defend himself, or when they attack his little children who cannot defend themselves? God's wrath and power are kindled to a level so intense that no one can enter the temple. It would be like a human being marching into a room where an atomic bomb explosion was detonating continuously.

Chapter Sixteen

The Final Birth Pangs: The Seven Bowls of Wrath

Bowl 1:

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.' So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image." (Revelation 16:1-2).

Hammer Fall 1:

From the temple filled with the smoke of God's glory and power comes the voice of God, and it is loud. The word for "loud" is again the Greek "megas" from which we get "mega." This is the commanding mega-voice of God, the voice of the One who is all-powerful. "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

The Greek for "wrath" is "thumas," which is "passion" (as if breathing hard.) When we as human beings are hot with rage, we breathe hard. This is but a shadow of the fierceness of God whose every kindness, love, compassion and pity for lost men has been rejected, and He is fiercely and intensely indignant and angry at the wholesale embrace of every evil by humans, but especially that they shed the innocent human blood of His servants. These seven last plagues are exceedingly fierce, the final birth pangs which are the most intense and painful of all God's judgments; the seven Bowls come like an almost continuous hammer fall of rapid succession, being only days, if not hours, apart!

The first Bowl "became a loathsome and malignant sore." Whether boils, cancerous malignancies, or some new disease undreamt of by man, these sores are very, very bad for those "who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image." The sores are disgusting, and hurt bad, real bad.

Bowl 2:

"The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died." (Revelation 16:3).

Hammer Fall 2:

The second Bowl is poured out on the sea. The miracle of Moses turning the Nile to blood, and then the second Trumpet turning the third of the sea to blood, are now eclipsed by all the sea turning to blood, like that of a dead man! All the salt water in all the oceans of the world changes into blood! Every living thing in the sea dies. Most of the oxygen we breathe comes from the plankton in the sea. This judgment means man's air supply is dwindling fast!

Bowl 3:

"Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, 'Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.'

And I heard the altar saying, 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.'" (Revelation 16:4-7).

Hammer Fall 3:

Where the second Bowl attacks salt waters, now the third Bowl attacks man's fresh water, turning it too into blood! The sources of drinking water in nature, the rivers and springs of water, are no longer available. The planet is awash in blood, blood, blood! The angel praises God for doing it. The wicked people of earth had shed the blood of God's saints; now they are given it to drink! Even the altar in heaven (Rev. 6:9; 8:3) cries out in praise of the fitness of God's judgments.

Perhaps we might say, "Oh, come on! An altar talks?" Yet, we need to remember that this is God's universe, and it obeys His will. When on Palm Sunday Jesus approached Jerusalem, let us remember the people hailed Him as the Messiah, "shouting, 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' But Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!'" (Luke 19:38-40). Here in Revelation 16, the stones do indeed cry out, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

Bowl 4:

"The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over the plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory." (Revelation 16:8-9).

Hammer Fall 4:

The star which we call our sun will suddenly increase its output, and rebellious, wicked people will be burned by it. Not only are men scorched by its tremendous burning, but heat makes people thirst; for them, though, all the water is turned to blood! Don't feel sorry for them. This is a fitting judgment. They do not repent, but curse God. They will not bend the knee to God; they will not have God to rule over them.

Bowl 5:

"Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds." (Revelation 16:10-11).

Hammer Fall 5:

A picture of the torment of Hell is found in Matthew 25 in the parable of the talents. The unfaithful servant buried his allotment; he did nothing with what he was entrusted. Later, his master settled accounts, and the unfaithful servant came up short:

"But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave...throw out that worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'" (Matthew 25:26a, 30).

Hell is not only a place of torment, but it is a place of unspeakable darkness, the glory of God and His light being totally absent, and in the darkness, His wrath is being eternally poured out. When Jesus was on the cross in the agony of crucifixion, darkness fell on Him for three hours (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44). Bible teacher John MacArthur said that this darkness was the experience of going to Hell, with the wrath of God being poured out on Jesus in that darkness for those three hours. Jesus Christ experienced the awfulness of the darkness of Hell for three hours so that we could be saved from it forever.

As a side note, it is my thought that it lasted three hours so that Jesus could experience the wrath of the whole Trinity, an hour for the Father, an hour for the Son, and an hour for the Holy Spirit. Jesus in His deity is the Son, but in His humanity, He faced the wrath of the triune God against Himself. He bore our sins in His body on the cross to pay for us so we could escape Hell, and instead be forgiven and accepted into God's kingdom and God's family.

Those in the kingdom of the Antichrist experience the darkness and tormenting pain of hell. The pain will be so bad, they will chew their tongues and blaspheme God. They'll have the loathsome and malignant sores, fierce burning heat (another hint of Hell), thirst with only blood to drink, and pain in the darkness. They hate and curse God, but they do not repent. They have long ago reached the point of no return, for as we shall see in Revelation 20, no one gets saved after the middle of the Tribulation.

Bowl 6:

"The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. ('Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothing so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.') And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon." (Revelation 16:12-16).

Hammer Fall 6:

The people of the earth are in a maddened frenzy, hating and cursing God with all their being. The blood-filled Euphrates River dries up to allow troops from China and other eastern kingdoms to come. Then the "unholy trinity" of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet, send forth demonic spirits to do miracles to get all the armies of the world to come to the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:9-14), which is the place called Armageddon. This collection of all the armies of the world is what will fuel the slaughter we saw in Rev. 14:19, which symbolically portrays grapes being reaped "from the earth and thrown into the great wine press of the wrath of God." There will be so many troops and so much bloodshed that "blood came out from the winepress, up to the horses' bridles for a distance of two hundred miles." (Rev. 14:19b-20).

In the midst of this grim picture, Jesus gives His surviving saints living on earth at this time an encouragement. "Behold, I am coming like a thief." A thief does not announce where or when he is coming, but does his deeds where and when people do not expect him. Jesus is saying to the

remaining survivors that He is coming shortly; that is, the Second Coming is nearly at hand. Jesus goes on to encourage them, "Blessed is the one who stays awake." In other words, He is saying, "Be looking for Me." Just as a thief will not catch by surprise the man of the house awake and watching, so the believers are encouraged to wait for Jesus. The blessing also says, "...and keeps his clothing so that he will not walk about naked and men not see his shame." This is also an encouragement to stay faithful and true to Jesus with righteous deeds, for those deeds are righteous acts that are like pure white garments. Don't give in to sin, especially not Jesus' return is SO close! Hang in there!

Bowl 7:

"Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, 'It is done.' And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake, and so mighty. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men, and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe." (Revelation 16:17-21).

Hammer Fall 7:

The "mega" voice of God from within the smoke-filled temple says, "It is done." There are lightnings, sounds and thunder. Then, the most stupendous earthquake of all time strikes. No earthquake in man's history matches it, for it is so violent that every city in the world falls, be it London, Tokyo, Beijing, Paris, none withstands this quake. The great city, Babylon, is split into three parts, and then it is struck with a special destruction, as we shall see in Revelation chapter 18. The troops of the armies of the world which are, at this point in time, en route to Armageddon, are suddenly without cities back home to which they can return. The bridge behind them has been cut and burned--there is no turning back. So mighty is this quake, that every island sinks into and is swallowed up into the oceans. Since the oceans are full of blood like that of a dead man, there are no survivors. The very tectonic plates of the planet's crust have so shifted that even the mightiest mountain ranges of the world, the Rocky Mountains, the Alps, or the Himalayas, sink or crumble away into nothingness. Mount Everest, the highest mountain on earth, cannot be found. It is gone!

This earthquake is actually a fulfillment of a prophecy for the coming of the Lord Jesus:

"A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.'" (Isaiah 40:3-5).

This mightiest of all earthquakes comes just before the Second Coming of Christ (seen in Rev. 19). Yet, this earthquake alone is not the entirety of the last plague. Back when Joshua led the children of Israel against the Amorites, the Scripture says, "As they fled from before Israel, while they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far

as Azekah, and they died; there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword." (Joshua 10:11).

Now, from the skies there falls the mightiest hailstorm of all man's history. Hailstones each weighing about 100 pounds (one talent) fall from the sky. It would only take one such hailstone to kill a man or animal. What kind of destruction can it be when the storm sweeps across the entire world? Even though men are receiving their just due, they still blaspheme God, for the plague of the hailstones "was extremely severe."

The earth and those who dwell in it have received the continuous hammer fall of these seven last judgments. The next two chapters, 17 and 18, are again parenthetical, so the next in the time sequence will be chapter 19.

Chapter Seventeen

Babylon the Religion

"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.' And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, 'Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.'" (Rev 17:1-5).

This chapter and the next are parenthetical. We have already seen in Rev. 14:8 an angel saying, "Fallen, fallen in Babylon the Great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." Then again we saw Babylon receive judgment at the 7th Bowl: "The great city was split into three parts...Babylon the Great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath." (Rev 16:19).

Now, in two more chapters, we see a great deal more being said about Babylon. There are over 100 references to Babylon in the Old Testament, and about a dozen in the New Testament. Who or what is this Babylon, and why does God devote so much of the Bible to addressing it? As it is, most of the references are to the kingdom of Babylon as it prospered in the days of King Nebuchadnezzar. The sons of Israel, as God's people, were to live holy lives, but they did not. Time and again God sent prophets to them warning them to repent from the sinful ways they kept embracing. They ignored God and kept on ignoring Him, so finally He caused Nebuchadnezzar to come against them with his armies and overthrow them. That pagan king carried away captive many of the people of Israel into the land and city of Babylon.

Babylon was an awe-inspiring city, even by modern standards. Ancient historical writings placed the size of Babylon as quite huge. It had a great wall surrounding it of a height of about 400 feet. The city and walls were laid out in a square straddling across a river. These walls were 14 miles on each side, and were so thick that several chariots could travel side by side across the top of the wall. Babylon's citizens, army and rulers thought themselves invincible, for who could assail such a wall? The wall was too high to go over, and too thick to go through. The people could not be starved out by siege, for they lacked nothing of food and water. They were safe and they were secure.

Nebuchadnezzar was quite proud of all his accomplishments. We saw previously in the vision of the great statue with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, and legs and feet of iron, that God had revealed to the king that the head of gold was Babylon, but its empire and dominion would give way to a series of other empires. This was intolerable to Nebuchadnezzar, who subsequently built a statue like one in the dream, but made it entirely of gold, saying in effect that Babylon would NOT be followed by other empires. It was an

expression of Babylon's belief in its invincibility and that their empire would last forever. This attitude was reflected in God's pronouncement of judgment:

"Yet you said, 'I will be a queen forever.' These things you did not consider nor remember the outcome of them. Now, then, you sensual one, who dwells securely, who says in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one beside me. I will not sit as a widow, nor know loss of children.' But these two things will come on you suddenly in one day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come on you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries, in spite of the great power of your spells. You felt secure in your wickedness and said, 'No one sees me,' your wisdom and your knowledge, they have deluded you; for you have said in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me.' But evil will come on you which you will not know how to charm away; and disaster will fall on you for which you cannot atone; and destruction about which you do not know will come on you suddenly. Stand fast in your spells and in your many sorceries with which you have labored from your youth; perhaps you will be able to profit, perhaps you may cause trembling. You are wearied with your many counsels; let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you. Behold, they have become like stubble, fire burns them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame; there will be no coal to warm by nor a fire to sit before! So have those become to you with whom you have labored, who have trafficked with you from your youth; each has wandered in his way; there is none to save you." (Isaiah 47:7-15).

Babylon was a great city, seemingly invulnerable, but when God sets His face against evil doers to punish them, nothing can prevent it from happening. Jeremiah the prophet was commissioned by God to warn Israel that Nebuchadnezzar would overthrow them. However, even prior to those prophesied days when God would bring Nebuchadnezzar against them, God also promised Israel that He would judge proud, idolatrous Babylon; though Israel had not yet fallen to Babylon's armies, prophecy was already given of Babylon's subsequent overthrow as though it were an already accomplished fact, its great wall notwithstanding.

"I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will make what he has swallowed come out of his mouth; and the nations will no longer stream to him. Even the wall of Babylon has fallen down!" (Jeremiah 51:44).

Prophecy called out, "fallen, fallen is Babylon" (Isaiah 21:9), long before Israel was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. History teaches us that the wall of Babylon did not protect her, for while no one could go OVER the wall, nor go THROUGH the wall, the armies of the Medes and Persians diverted Babylon's river and marched UNDER the wall in the river bed. Babylon was "fallen, fallen" in a single night.

"That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two." (Daniel 5:30-31).

Centuries passed, and Babylon declined to the point where it was only a ruin and a memory. So why, then, does the Book of Revelation take so many pains to describe Babylon and its doom? Babylon was both a place of idolatry as a religious system, and a political power as a city and a nation. The first and original Babylon (also called "Babel") was founded when the peoples of

Earth assembled together to build the infamous "Tower of Babel" in the plain in the land of Shinar located today in modern Iraq (Genesis 11:1-9). It was ruled by Nimrod, of whom the Scripture says, "He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.'" (Gen. 10:9).

Commentators have indicated that he was a hunter, not of animals, but of souls, for he gathered men around himself:

"The beginning of [Nimrod's] kingdom was Babel..." (Gen. 10:10)

The Tower of Babel was an attempt at proud, self-based religion, not worship of God:

"They said, 'Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.'" (Gen. 11:4).

God didn't like their sinful pride, and confused their single universal language into many languages; the very thing they had dreaded, happened, for they were scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.

"Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:9).

Ancient history tells us Nimrod had a very beautiful wife named Semiramis who was quite evil. She originated a false religion out of her child, Tammuz. Her husband Nimrod was slain for his wickedness by Shem, the son of Noah, so Semiramis responded by claiming Nimrod was a god, and his spirit lived again in their child, Tammuz. Thus there sprung up (no doubt by Satan's hand behind the scenes) a mother and child cult, where Tammuz her child who was a son of a god, and she Semiramis was elevated to being a Goddess since she was the "mother of God" and the "queen of heaven." God was grieved and angered that the Israelites practiced this idolatry, and all the more because entire families, parents and children alike, were participating in it!

"Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out offerings to other gods in order to spite Me." (Jeremiah 7:17-18).

The false Mother and Child cult spread everywhere, in Egypt as Isis and Osiris, in India as Isi and Iswara, in Asia as Cybele and Deoius, in Rome as Fortuna and Jupiter, in Greece as Ceres the Great Mother with the babe at her breast, or as Irene the goddess of Peace with the boy Plutus in her arms, and in China as Shing Moo the Holy Mother with a child in her arms. (Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons*, 3rd edition, pgs. 20-21). When the true Child, Christ, came born of a virgin, Mary, Satan's counterfeit Mother and Child cult was already well entrenched around the world. Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was a re-emergence of both the religion and political power of the original Babylon. While his newer Babylon eventually was militarily overthrown by the Medo-Persian Empire, the Babylonian religion lived on.

The Babylonian religion is a "mystery" religion. This means that only those initiated into it would be entrusted with its inner secrets. It has survived down through the ages in many forms, and is still with us today. Many of the practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church have Babylonian mystery religion behind them at their core; the pagan practices and terms have been "Christianized" by replacing them with suitable names that appeal to Christians (see *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop). The satanic counterfeit goddess Mother-and-Child adopted the names of Mary and Jesus; however, the usage of Mary in the context of Catholic teachings about her is NOT the Mary of the Bible, nor is the Jesus of this usage a true reflection of the true Jesus of the Bible.

The Catholic version of Mary is made part of the redemption process, calling her "co-redemptrix" or "mediatrix," terms meaning she had an active and essential part in man's salvation by sharing with Jesus the position of mediator between God and man. In plain words, Roman Catholicism places God at the top, Jesus below Him, then Mary, and then man. According to this theology, Jesus is portrayed as very angry with mankind for its sins, essentially sitting in heaven with His arms folded, scowling down at disobedient mankind. Therefore, when a man needs intercession before God, he cannot dare come directly to Jesus, but must pray to Mary, who then intercedes with Jesus with a mother's love (for who could harden their heart against their own mother!) in order to appease His anger and coax Him into interceding with the Father. This is a grievous error and delusion, for Scripture plainly tells us, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5)

There is only ONE mediator between God and man, not two. Mary has no part or portion in the mediation process by which man gets reconciled with God. Yet, by the Mother-and-Child cult, Mary is called "queen of heaven" and "mother of God", the very same idolatrous names attributed to the evil "goddess" Semiramis. In Catholic art, whether by means of painting or sculpture, Mary is shown in a superior position and Christ in a weak position. She is the strong mother, while He is the weak and helpless baby. She is the weeping but alive mother, while Christ is the dead crucified corpse in her arms. Another artwork portrays Mary crucified on the cross, making HER the redeemer who shed blood for the sins of the world!

Quite contrary to Mary being involved in the redemption process, she herself acknowledged her own need to be redeemed from sin after she was visited by the angel Gabriel to be told she would bear Jesus. Mary said, "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my savior." (Luke 1:47). One who is without sin would not need a Savior. By her own words we see Mary needed a Savior like any other human being, even as the Scripture says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). Her privilege, and the thing for which we honor her, is that she was chosen to bear that Savior who would one day save her. In a powerful Christian song called "Mary Did You Know?", it says, "This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you." Certainly it is true that Jesus is the Son of God; indeed, that song has another great truth: "When you kissed your little baby, you kissed the face of God." Nevertheless, the idolatrous goddess Mother-and-Child cult has misappropriated the names of Mary and Jesus, redefining who they truly are, elevating Mary and denigrating Jesus; this satanic cult, the religion of Babylon, lives on as a spiritual cancer in our day and cuts across the entire world, for it is the root and mother of all false religions, including Islam and Hinduism.

John's vision of the "great harlot" is portraying the religious side of Babylon. She is portrayed as a harlot and called the "mother of harlots" because as a religion it has prostituted itself, never truthfully reflecting the true God, but always adapting itself in whatever culture of the day to be sought out by men everywhere; it is the root and mother of all false religions in the world. We see her as the one who "sits on many waters."

God spoke against Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's day, saying, "O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your end." (Jeremiah 51:13). The "many waters" upon which the harlot sits is the great sea of humanity all over the earth, for the kings of the earth have allowed the Babylonian cult, in all its myriad forms, to have predominance over the souls of their subjects. Spiritually speaking, the kings have "committed acts of immorality" with this religious prostitute by subscribing to her lying spiritual leadership instead of following the true God. Not only have the kings of the earth "dallied" with this religious harlot, but worse yet, the citizens of the kingdoms of the earth -- especially during the last days -- have followed the folly of their leaders in giving in to the false religion of Babylon, and have become "drunk" with the wine of her immorality. Babylon's false religion has intoxicated them with spiritual lies.

The Apostle Paul warned against spiritual deception in the last days, saying, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (1 Timothy 4:1).

In the book of Revelation, those living on the earth in unbelief are called "those who dwell on the earth." The immorality with which "those who dwell on the earth" have intoxicated themselves is identified, for we are told she has "in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality." False religion practices abominations, telling people that homosexuality is good and normal, a lie that defies the true God who has called homosexuality an abomination (Leviticus 18:22). These and other lies get shamelessly promoted.

The woman is seated "on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns." This beast is the same beast we saw in Rev. 13:1. The scarlet color is the color of shed blood. This should be no surprise to us, for we have already seen that the Antichrist causes a worldwide killing spree against the saints of God. By being seated on the scarlet beast, the Babylonian religious system is shown to be supported and carried by the beast. For a while, the Dragon and the Antichrist will tolerate and support the Babylonian cult, but only for a while, as we shall see later in this chapter.

The woman in the vision is clothed in purple and scarlet. The dyes for these colors were very expensive, so their presence indicates great wealth, as it usually took a king or a queen to afford them. The woman is also adorned with gold, precious stones and pearls, the finest treasures of earth filling the coffers of the kings of the earth. They pay the harlot for her services very well.

On her forehead a name was written. Up to now, we have seen the seal of God upon believers' foreheads (Rev. 7:3) and the infamous 666 Mark upon unbelievers' foreheads (Rev. 13:16). Now we see this false religious system portrayed as a harlot also having a name on her forehead, "Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." This name is

called a "mystery." In the Scripture, a mystery is something not previously revealed, but is now being revealed. The mystery is this, that every spiritual lie, every immoral deed, every abominable thing, every idolatry, had its start in the false religion of Babylon.

It is true that the first sin by the human race started with Adam and Eve. However, it was not the FIRST sin. Satan's rebellion was pure Babylon, in that he wanted the worship going to God, to come to him instead. Adam and Eve were first subverted by Satan's misleading spiritual lies, which were false religion in which they believed they could be themselves gods in having the authority to decide for themselves without God. Rev 18:24 says, concerning Babylon, "And in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth." Babylon is Satan's master plan to trick and deceive humans into first worshipping something other than the true God, which in turn paves the way to ultimately turn that misdirected worship to himself. That is why he first uses mystery Babylon to gather all the religions of the world under one roof; then, once it has completed its job, he turns on it and destroys it, because it has served its purpose so that he can now get all that worship directed to him.

"And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly." (Revelation 17:6).

The woman was intoxicated, not with alcohol, but with innocent blood! Concerning every murder of every true believer in God, this religious system will have had its hand in it. In the days ahead, it is likely there will be a great movement to organize a great religion encompassing everyone on planet Earth--that is, for everyone except believers in the true God and His Messiah, Jesus. This one-world religion will tolerate all religious points of view, except that it will be intolerant of those who do not bow the knee to any God except the one true God.

Persecution will grow rapidly as this one-world religion explodes onto the world scene. There are currently efforts in the United Nations to stop terrorism due to religion, and there is a movement to get all the religions of the world to get along; this movement is called the "Alliance of Civilizations" (AOC). What will NOT be tolerated are those who won't "play ball." So it is possible that the one-world religion may arise from out of the United Nations. Whatever its source, the religion of ancient Babylon revealed in the one-world religion with its idolatrous "mystery" teachings will fully (and likely soon) raise its ugly head, revealed in all its purple and scarlet and precious stones and pearls and golden cup full of abominations. Those that will not join it will have their blood shed.

"And the angel said to me, 'Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. The beast which was and is

not, is himself also an eight and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.'" (Revelation 17:7-11).

In this chapter lies one of the most puzzling passages in all the prophetic Scriptures: "the beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction."

When this study of Revelation began, we found that the signs and symbols of Revelation are interpreted either by Revelation itself, or by how the symbols are used elsewhere in the Bible. Three times (twice in vs. 8 and once in vs. 11) we are told the beast "was and is not." Comparing Scripture with Scripture--in this case, with Revelation itself--let us examine and compare. In Revelation 13, we are shown the beast and are told--also three times--that it had a deadly wound and was healed. Therein lies at least part of the explanation. Let us compare them.

"I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed." (Rev. 13:3)

"And [the False Prophet] makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed." (Rev. 13:12)

"...telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image of the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life." (Rev 13:14)

In each instance, the Antichrist was alive, then was not (i.e. received a fatal wound, most likely via assassination), and then came back to life again in a way so amazing that the people on earth worship him and make an idol to him. When it says that the beast "is about to come up out of the abyss," we already know the abyss is a dark pit in which demons dwell. It has been suggested that this is another indication that the devil, Satan, will possess the Antichrist totally, and that is what is meant by him coming up out of the abyss. If this thought is true, then the time of the "was, and is not, and come up" would be just before the middle of the Tribulation period. Once the assassination occurs, Satan uses his power to restore Antichrist, and he goes into the temple of God in Jerusalem to declare himself to be God, using this back-from-the-dead as the authentication of his claim to being God.

In another parallel between Rev 13 and Rev 17, we also find that the people wonder in amazement, both times in that the beast "had a deadly wound and was healed", and that the beast "was, and is not":

Compare the following:

"I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole world was amazed and followed after the beast." (Rev. 13:3)

"And those who dwell on the earth...will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come." (Rev 17:8).

So, comparing Scripture with Scripture, we find two great parallels:

- 1) three times that the beast lived, had a deadly wound, and was healed, and three times that the beast was, is not, and will come again.
- 2) that because of the impossible recovery from the above, the world is awed by it and drawn to follow and worship the beast.

It is not unreasonable, therefore, to gather that the explanation for the great puzzle of "was, is not, and will come again" is rooted in a miraculous recovery of the Antichrist after what seems to be a successful assassination attempt ("had the wound by the sword and has come to life" Rev. 13:14b).

One last thought is this. God is called "Him who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev 1:4). The description of the beast that John saw "was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss" shows us again that Antichrist's claim to be God in the Abomination of Desolation falls short of the Divinity he is arrogantly claiming. Antichrist is NOT Him "who is and who was and who is to come"--the best he can do is he "who was, and is NOT, and who is to come." Indeed, it is a case of the Moon thinking its reflected light is its own, and not that of the true Sun. Satan falls short of God, and Antichrist falls short of Jesus Christ!

The seven heads of the scarlet beast have two meanings:

First, they represent "seven mountains on which the woman sits." It is no secret that for centuries, Rome has been known as "the city on seven hills." The Roman Catholic Church with its Mother-Child cult and other Babylonian symbols and practices is seated in the Vatican in the heart of Rome. Vatican comes from the Latin word "vaticanus" which means "divination." While some might think that divination relates to the Divine in a good sense, in fact the opposite is true. Divination is an occultic practice forbidden and condemned by God (Lev. 19:26; 2 Chr. 33:6; Jer. 14:14; Eze. 13:6; Acts 16:16).

Second, the seven heads represent seven kingdoms. We saw from Daniel's prophecy of the great statue that Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome would appear and reign, each in its own turn. The words "five have fallen" indicate two prior world empires, Egypt and Assyria, plus Babylon, Medo-Persia, and lastly Greece. Then the words "one is" represents the empire of Rome at that time. Finally, the words "the other has not yet come" point us to the Revived Roman Empire, which is represented in the vision of the great statue of Daniel 2 as the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay. In John's day, this last world empire was still far, far in the future (though in our day, it is very, very near).

When the angel said, "when he comes, he must remain a little while," he is telling us that the last world empire would be around only for a very short while, namely, the seven years of the Tribulation period. When you think of it, seven years is a very short time indeed compared to other world empires that lasted for decades or centuries.

When we looked at the prophecy of Daniel chapter 7, we saw a succession of vision animals representing the successive world empires. The last beast was described as "dreadful" (the Roman Empire) and it had ten horns (the Revived Roman Empire). Daniel was told, "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings." (Daniel 7:24).

The ten horns, or ten countries with their corresponding ten leaders, will arise first; then that eleventh horn that came up after the ten, is the Antichrist, and is the same meaning as "the beast...is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven." (Rev. 17:11)

Finally, we are told in Rev. 17:11 that "he goes to destruction." The Antichrist is doomed to destruction at the hands of the true Christ, Jesus. In the Seventy Weeks prophecy in Daniel 9, the 70th Week (the Tribulation period) is where the "abomination of desolation" occurs, and the Antichrist who commits it, we are told, is doomed to destruction by God's decree: "...and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27).

"The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. They have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords, and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." (Rev. 17:12-14).

As we previously saw from the prophecy in Daniel 7, the ten horns are the ten kings Antichrist will rule. When the Scripture says they, "have not yet received a kingdom," it is because when John had the vision, the original old Roman Empire was in power, and it would be far in the future before the Revived Roman Empire would come to power. However, when its time does arrive, it will come to power on the heels of the Rapture, because of which the world will be in an emergency crisis. Panic and fear will be everywhere with the disappearance of millions. The Antichrist, aided by Satan's every trick, wile and power, will rise to sudden prominence, and likely the ten kings will deliberate for a short time (perhaps literally just one hour), and deliver over to him dictator powers to deal with "the emergency" (i.e. the Rapture). Seven years later at the Second Coming, this 10-nation power base of the Antichrist will fight against Jesus ("they will wage war against the Lamb"), and will be utterly overthrown by Him ("and the Lamb will overcome them.")

"And he said to me, 'The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her with fire. For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.'" (Rev. 17:15-18).

As said earlier, the many waters on which the harlot sits are all the peoples of the earth. Initially, the harlot will be seated on and be carried by the scarlet beast. However, once the Abomination of Desolation comes (at which Satan, having possessed the Antichrist, seeks to receive worship), the great one-world religion will be unwelcome. Satan wants all the worship, and will not tolerate competition, and will destroy the false religious Babylonian system. It will have served its purpose to get mankind's eyes off the true God and divert them to other gods, which are but idols behind which he, Satan, was receiving worship indirectly. Now he will desire all that worship openly and directly, and will mercilessly "make her desolate and naked, and eat her flesh and burn her with fire." The predatory beast will turn on his rider and destroy her. By doing so, though, the Antichrist and his ten kings accomplish God's purpose to judge this idolatrous

religious system that has misled men, women and children since the dawn of human history, starting at the Tower of Babel.

Now, it is important to remember that Babylon was not a religious system only, as we have just seen it described, but it was a political city of great pride. We are told, "The woman you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth." In the next chapter, we will look at Babylon the city.

Chapter Eighteen

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.'" (Rev. 18:1-3).

Another angel comes forth, having "great authority." God has authorized him to pronounce this coming doom of Babylon. The angel lights up the earth with his glory. That draws to our mind the appearance of the angel at the resurrection of Jesus: "And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothes as white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). Lightning lights up the whole sky during its brief stroke. This angel not only radiates such sky-filling light, but does so continuously. He cries out, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." These words were first uttered in a prophecy against Babylon in ancient times: "Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs, and one said, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground.'" (Isaiah 21:9).

In Revelation chapters 17 and 18, Babylon is called "the great city." Let us consider this a moment. These prophecies in Revelation concerning Babylon are about the future during the Tribulation period; yet, Babylon the city died out many centuries ago from our modern day. Today, it is located in modern Iraq. The late Saddam Hussein reputedly spent vast sums of money during the late 20th century to rebuild it. His dream was to make ancient Babylon rebuilt into a modern "Disneyland" of the Middle East. Yet, modern Babylon is mostly a tourist spot, hardly a "great city." Is this prophecy in Revelation telling us today -- in the 21st century -- that it will live again?

Some scholars cite Scriptures that indicate that the Babylon of the Chaldeans, at it reached its glory under Nebuchadnezzar, would be destroyed by the Medes and would never rise again (Isa 13:19-22; Jer 51:24-26; 61-64). So, they believe that the Babylon of that era would never be rebuilt. Even if the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's day would never be rebuilt, Revelation 18 prophesies a literal city called Babylon.

One thing we must learn about Bible prophecy is that things that seemed impossible of fulfillment actually happen. In the vision of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel chapter 37, the LORD used Ezekiel to prophesy, in symbolic language, of a literal return of literal Israel to its literal land of old. The vision showed that Israel's return would be in two stages: first, in spiritual unbelief (Eze. 37:1-8), and then later in faith (Eze 37:8-14). The first part of that vision has already happened, for the sons of Israel returned to the land and the nation of Israel was reborn on May 14, 1948. As prophesied, their return there is in unbelief, for they do not believe in Jesus as their Messiah. However, once the Rapture occurs and the Two Witnesses begin their ministry, then many sons and daughters of Israel will finally come to faith in Jesus Christ to fulfill the second part of that vision.

For centuries prior to Israel's return, many people thought that God had forsaken the Jews. Theologians were in a quandary. On the one hand, God's promises cannot fail. On the other hand, there was no more Israel. Oh, there were always the few Jews here and there, always persecuted and hounded wherever they went (so much so they were called "the wandering Jews"), but they were obviously no longer a people with a home and a country to call their own. Theologians resolved this seeming discrepancy by arguing that the promises made by God to Israel were transferred to the Christian Church. This way, the literal promises of God for a literal nation of Israel were spiritualized, and God was "off the hook" for making promises that, to them, had otherwise failed. This thinking is called Replacement Theology. In the spirit of that theology, much harm and evil was done to the children of Israel for many long centuries. After all, if God Himself was finished with the people of Israel, then people felt no qualms about dealing harshly with the Jews. The Jews were labeled the "Christ killers," and were thus persecuted and even killed. While a great deal of the harm came from those in the Roman Catholic Church, those among the Protestants were sadly guilty too. The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, had much that was bad to say about them, and the modern Lutheran church finally apologized to the Jews for what Luther had said.

However, God had not forgotten His people Israel and the promises of God did not fail, though so many years have passed. Even as Stage 1 of Israel's return has already happened (Eze. 37:1-8), so will Stage 2 (vs. 9-10), of which it is said: "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have spoken and done it," declares the LORD." (Ezekiel 37:14).

The persecution of Jews by Christians is shameful and wrong. Hear this, Christians! No believer in Jesus Christ has any business being anti-Semitic! It is true that most Jews to this day still remain hardened in their hearts against belief in Jesus as the Messiah, and so are enemies of the Christian gospel (Romans 11:28), but nonetheless God will still faithfully fulfill His promises to Israel. In his great letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul, himself an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1), was explaining that the current state of unbelief among the Israelites is a partial hardening upon their hearts as a punishment because they had hardened their hearts against their Messiah, Jesus, when He came to them. Scripture says partial" in regard to the hardening, for there has always been down through the years a remnant of Jews who do believe in Jesus. But, the time of that hardening will finally come to end when fullness of the Gentiles has happened. What is the "fullness of the Gentiles"? It is that point in time when all the Gentiles, who will ever make up the Church, will have gotten saved; the moment that last person gets saved, then the Rapture will take them out of the world.

"For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come on; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.' 'This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (Romans 11:25-29).

After the Rapture, the time of the Gentiles will be over, and it will be back to the time God deals directly with Israel as He did for so many centuries, from Abraham's day until the time of Christ. God truly knows the future. Israel's return to the land in unbelief first was prophesied, and it has happened. We have seen in this study of Revelation that the moment the first day of the 70th Week begins, God's Two Witnesses will appear in Israel, giving the testimony of the Law and the Prophets to the descendants of Jacob, telling them that Jesus is the Messiah, and many, many sons and daughters of Israel will finally turn to Him. "And so all Israel will be saved." It will be then that Stage 2 of Israel's prophesied return to the land -- in belief -- will also happen. It will have taken many, many centuries, but it was always certain and inevitable to happen.

All of this was to illustrate that even though Babylon seems to be destined only to remain a relic, hardly a "great city," it too can rise up out of its own ashes to live again. Because Babylon is (as of this writing) more of a museum piece than a full city, some writers have interpreted the Babylon of Revelation 18 symbolically as some other city, such as Rome or New York, or even as a nation, such as the United States of America. Nevertheless, God knows the future, and He has devoted a considerable portion of the book of Revelation to telling us about Babylon. It WILL happen! In Revelation 18, we are told of Babylon, called "the great" (vs. 2), "the strong city" (vs. 10), and "the great city" (vs. 10, 15, 18, 19, 21). Over and over we are told it is a city called "Babylon." Therefore, we can expect a great city to spring up in connection with the name Babylon. Perhaps the United Nations will move its headquarters to Babylon in Iraq, and the wealth of the world will flow into it to build it up into a mega-city practically overnight. There WILL be a powerful, mighty city called Babylon, and all the world will do commerce with it, for prophecy declares it.

Now, this city will be an incredible center of worldwide commerce, but not all commerce is good. In Babylon's bustling trade, it will become the epitome of evil, a "dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit." All the nations of the world will be involved with the vices of Babylon as Scripture says, "for all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." The new Babylon will be the wealthiest city of all time. No trade, no vice, no passion will be too sinister; everything will be permitted.

"I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back even as she has paid, and back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.' " (Revelation 18:4-6).

God calls for His people, such people as who will have gotten saved after the Rapture, to leave this mega-city. Long ago when God purposed to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of all their exceeding wickedness, He first sent angels to remove His servant Lot and family who lived in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-29). So then, here too in Revelation 18, God calls for the removal of His people before His judgment falls on the new Babylon. This is a consistent pattern with God -- before bringing down judgment, He brings His people to safety. He delivered Lot and his daughters before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah; He delivered Noah and

his family before flooding the earth; and before beginning the judgments of the seven years of the Tribulation period, He Raptures His Church, His very own Bride (more on that in Revelation chapter 19).

God promises in Revelation that He would pay her back "double according to her deeds." That day of reckoning is sure, and cannot be diverted, deflected or defeated.

"To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.' For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong." (Revelation 18:7-8).

In Isaiah 47, a prophecy is made against Babylon, declaring its downfall. With regard to Isaiah's lifetime, it would be about another 100 years before Israel would go into captivity in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. Nevertheless, God had a controversy against Babylon already because it dared to make boasts against God. In Isaiah 46, God says, "Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me" (Isaiah 46:9). In contrast, in Isaiah 47, God says to Babylon, "Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, who dwells securely, who says in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me. I will not sit as a widow, now know loss of Children'" (Isaiah 47:8). Babylon repeats the boast in Isaiah 47:10.

Compare what God says and what Babylon says:

God says, "I am God, and there is no one like Me."

Babylon says, "I am, and there is no one besides me."

Babylon's ego is nothing less than a challenge to God, a blasphemous and idolatrous boast! In Daniel chapter 2, we saw Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue which portrayed a succession of world empires, Babylon the head of gold, Medo-Persia the arms and breast of silver, Greece the belly and thighs of bronze, Rome the legs of iron, and the future Revived Romans Empire the feet and toes of iron and clay. In the chapter that followed that vision (Daniel 3), Nebuchadnezzar defied the dream of prophecy and built that great statue he saw in his dream, but instead of multiple metals, he built it entirely of gold. This is the boast of Babylon that God hates: "I will not sit as a widow, nor know loss of children." Babylon vaunted itself up that it would be the ONLY world empire, not just the head of gold, but the whole statue. In other words, Babylon would go on forever and ever. Since only God exists forever and ever, this is a blasphemous boast. The future Babylon of Revelation 18 makes the same evil boast.

Since Babylon boasts it will last forever, God therefore decrees that its overthrow will happen in just one day. What a contrast: lasting forever, versus termination in one day. The Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's day was indeed overthrown in one day when the Medes and Persians marched under the walls of Babylon; the future Babylon will be overthrown in a far more spectacular way...

...by pestilence, as horrid disease sweeps over the thronging masses of people in that great city

...by mourning, as the loss of everything confronts them

...by famine, as unbearable hunger strikes them

...by fire, as they are burned up totally, completely, forever.

None of this is subtle, but each blow hits powerfully, "for the Lord God who judges her is strong."

"And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come!'" (Rev. 18:9-10).

Notice, please, that they wail at a distance. There is no going through the rubble looking for survivors, as is common today after a natural disaster such as an earthquake. Something about the destruction of the city is so terrible that they are afraid to go near. Perhaps an atomic bomb destroyed it; the threat of radiation would be plenty enough incentive to keep your distance. However, it may be something entirely else, something recognizably Divine in nature like the fire and brimstone God rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah" (Genesis 19:24-28).

"And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more--cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linens and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives." (Revelation 18:11-13).

The kings of the earth, including the politicians and ministers and presidents and dictators, all mourn for the loss of this city. Now it's the turn of the merchants of the earth. The list of goods is extensive and detailed, and is proof this is talking about a literal, not symbolic, great city. If indeed the world's eyes turn to Babylon, Iraq, and multitudes throng to that city, there would be a huge and insatiable market for possessions, both needful (such as food, clothing and shelter) and luxuries. If a world government such as will be ruled over by Antichrist takes up residence there, the city would become a madhouse of bustling, thriving commerce. Every conceivable thing that can be bought and sold would flow toward the new Babylon. Of peculiar interest in the list are the last two items, slaves and human lives.

The practice of slavery and owning slaves are about as old as the human race, and apparently will be practiced in new Babylon as well. The last on the list, human lives, is of particular interest. One of the trends in American entertainment is called "reality shows." Considering that the old Roman Empire had gladiators battling--and dying--for the entertainment of the masses, I can't help but wonder if the current trend in "reality shows" might, in the new Babylon, continue to get more and more "real" until they finally return to the days of the gladiators wherein contestants, for a hefty prize, will actually battle--and die--for the entertainment of the masses. This might well be the meaning of the prophecy that the merchants trade in "human lives." Time will tell.

"The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. The merchants of these

things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!' And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?' And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'" (Revelation 18:14-20).

The kings of the earth stand at a distance, afraid of Babylon's torment, and so do the merchants. Now we see that same lament over the destruction of Babylon coming from the seamen, who were the cargo carriers of the riches the merchants sold. These, too, stand afar off for fear of the burning torment that destroyed Babylon in just one hour. All these weep and mourn over this, a great city. For all those who live only for this life, subscribing to the philosophy, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:22), the destruction of Babylon is the loss of all their earthly aspirations and all they count valuable in this life. However, for those who have eternity and the love of God in their hearts, there is different reaction.

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.' Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, 'So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.'" (Revelation 18:20-24).

Babylon, the great city, the strong city, may well become the late Saddam Hussein's dream of a "Disneyland" of the Middle East. Not only will goods of every conceivable variety be bought and sold (including human beings), there will also be entertainment of all kinds and craftsmen of all kinds. It may well become the wealthiest city to ever exist on the earth. Nevertheless, it is doomed. A strong angel takes a great millstone, a huge and heavy round wheel of stone used to grind grain into flour, and hurls it into the sea. In contrast to the ungodly who weep and mourn, those who follow God are called to rejoice!

Babylon, old or new, has ever been in rebellion against God, and Revelation testifies of her that "all the nations were deceived by your sorcery." Babylon, both old and new, is held cumulatively responsible for "the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth." The religious and political ungodly Babylon is finally, once and for all time, judged and destroyed, never again to raise its ugly defiance of God and His righteousness.

Rejoice, indeed!

Chapter Nineteen

"After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her!'" (Revelation 19:1-2).

The parenthetical chapters 17 and 18, in which we took a close-up look at Babylon (which we first saw judged in Rev. 16:19), are now over, and we return to the countdown's end. The 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets and 7 Bowls are done. A great multitude praises God with hearty and heartfelt praise for two things. First, because He judged and put an end to Babylon's corrupting influence. Second, because He avenged the blood she shed. What He did was true and righteous, Good destroying Evil.

"And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen! Hallelujah!' And a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.'" (Revelation 19:3-5).

The praise for God continues. The voices say Babylon's smoke rises up forever and ever. Yet, as we shall see in Rev. 20, the earth itself will last only another 1,000 years, and then God will make a new heaven and a new earth in Rev. 21. The "forever and ever" is not an indication that the particular spot Babylon occupied physically on Earth will always smoke throughout all eternity, but that what happened to Babylon is permanent.

There was the first Babylon at the Tower of Babel in the days of Nimrod and Semiramis. Then there was the second Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's day. Then there will be that third Babylon so spectacularly destroyed in Revelation 18. The permanence of Babylon's destruction means there will never again be another Babylon, forever and ever. However, a case can be made for the souls of the people who were in Babylon, that the smoke of their torment will rise up forever and ever in the eternal fires of the Lake of Fire; these will be damned for all eternity (as we saw described back in Rev. 14:10-11), for truly every soul in that third Babylon on the day of its destruction will have received the 666 Mark of the Beast on their right hand or on their forehead. (Rev. 13:16-18)

The twenty four elders and four living creatures fall down and worship God, and then a voice speaks commanding praise. Whose voice is it? We see it comes from the throne. Who sits on the throne? God does. How then does the voice command, "Give praise to our God"? Why the word "our"? The answer lies in remembering that the Lamb is Jesus, who is God of very God, but also the Son of Man. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Jesus is the Word of God, present "with" God (the person of the Son being with the person of the Father), and yet also being "God" (being one in power, strength, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, purity, etc.) In Jesus' deity, God is His Father. In His humanity,

God is His God. Both of these truths were communicated to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection of Jesus:

"Jesus said to her, 'Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and to My God and to your God."' (John 20:17).

The double relationship of God to Jesus as both God and Father becomes also the double relationship of every believer in Jesus Christ. God is our God, and also our Father, as also the Apostle Paul wrote:

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:14-15).

So then, the voice from the throne is the voice of Jesus, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great." Even though Jesus is Deity, yet He delights to identify with mankind, and is not ashamed to call us His brethren (Hebrews 2:11b).

"Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.' Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do that, I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'" (Revelation 19:6-10).

The response to the command, "Give praise to our God," is so loud, that John the Apostle uses three similes of the loudest sounds he knew:

- 1) like the voice of a great multitude
- 2) like the sound of many waters
- 3) like the sound of a mighty peal of thunder

The first is the best fit, for it is indeed the combined voices of "all you bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great" (vs. 5). The praise that follows was so magnificent, that Handel used it (in the King James Version) in his world-famous oratorio Messiah in the Hallelujah Chorus: "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!"

After the glorious praise of God, rejoicing breaks out, for there is going to be a Wedding, the greatest wedding in the universe! The guests will number in the MILLIONS! The tables set up will be everywhere! Nothing but the finest linen, the finest silver, the most beautiful candlesticks, and the best food ever prepared. Reader, will YOU be there? If you trust in Jesus now, you can -- and will -- be.

Now, we already know who the Bridegroom is -- the Lamb, who is Jesus. The Bride is dressed in marvelous clothing, fine linen bright and clean, that represents the "righteous acts of the saints." But, who is this most acclaimed Bride, fit to be the wife of Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords? While on earth, Jesus spoke to His disciples just before He was taken and eventually crucified. He had just told Peter that he would deny Him three times (John 13:38). The disciples were troubled, so He told them:

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-2).

Jesus used a phraseology that referred to the wedding custom of their day (a custom that I have been told is still practiced even today in modern Israel).

In his article "Rapture of the Bride", Dr. Renold Showers explains the stages of a Jewish marriage.

1. Betrothal established the marriage covenant. The Jewish bridegroom took the initiative in marriage by leaving his father's house and traveling to the home of the prospective bride.
2. At the home of the prospective bride, the Jewish bridegroom would negotiate with her father to determine the price (mohar) that he must pay to purchase his bride.
3. Once the bridegroom paid the purchase price, the marriage covenant was established, and the young man and woman were regarded as husband and wife. From that moment on, the bride was declared to be consecrated or sanctified, set apart exclusively for her bridegroom.
4. As a symbol of the covenant relationship, the groom and bride would drink from a cup of wine over which a betrothal benediction had been pronounced.
5. After the marriage covenant was established, the groom would leave the bride's home and return to his father's house. There he would remain separate from his bride for a period of 12 months.
6. During this period of separation between the Jewish bride and groom, the bride would use this time to gather her trousseau and prepare for married life. The groom occupied himself with the preparation of living accommodations in his father's house where he would bring his bride.
7. At the end of the period of separation, the groom would come to take his bride to live with him. The taking of the bride usually took place at night.
8. The groom, best man and other male escorts would leave the Jewish groom's father's house and conduct a torch light procession to the home of the bride.
9. Although the Jewish bride was expecting her groom to come for her, she did not know the exact time of his coming.
10. As a result of the bride not knowing the exact time the groom would come for her, the groom's arrival would be preceded by a shout. This shout would forewarn the bride to be prepared for the coming of the groom.
11. After the Jewish groom received his bride together with her female attendants, the enlarged wedding party would return from the bride's home to the groom's father's home.
12. Upon arrival there, the wedding party would find that the wedding guests had assembled already.

13. Shortly after arrival, the bride (remaining veiled) and groom would be escorted by the other members of the wedding party to the bridal chamber (huppah). While the groomsmen and bridesmaids would wait outside, the bride and groom would enter the bridal chamber alone. There in the privacy of that place they would enter in physical union for the first time, consummating the marriage that was covenanted earlier.

14. After the marriage was consummated, the groom would announce the consummation to the other members of the wedding party waiting outside the chamber. These people would in turn pass this news on to the wedding guests. Upon hearing this news, the wedding guests would begin the feast and make merry for the next 7 days.

15. During those 7 days of the wedding festivities (sometimes called "the 7 days of huppah"), the bride remained hidden in the bridal chamber.

16. At the conclusion of the 7 days, the groom would bring his bride out of the bridal chamber, now with her veil removed, so that all could see who his bride was.

In God's plan for the ages, the Father purposed to get a fitting Bride for His Son. While all redeemed people will enjoy God forever, there is a special intimate relationship reserved between Christ and His Church. Let's look at how the stages of a Jewish Wedding are fulfilled in the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Bride.

To obtain His Bride, Jesus went through the steps of a Jewish Wedding Custom. He left His Father's house, heaven, and traveled to the house, earth, of His prospective bride, being born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The Apostle Paul acted the part of the Bride's father:

"For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." (1 Corinthians 4:15).

As the "father," Paul betrothed the Church to Jesus:

"For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin." (2 Corinthians 11:2).

The price Jesus paid to purchase His Bride was His blood shed on the cross:

"For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The covenanted relationship between a betrothed couple was so strong, that they were treated as husband and wife. When Joseph found Mary to be pregnant with Jesus, he wanted to divorce her, thinking she had been sexually unfaithful to him:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit'...and Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a son; and he called His name Jesus." (Matthew 1:18-20, 24-25)

The marriage covenant between Christ and the Church is so strong, that seeking comfort in the arms of the world rather than Christ is considered spiritual adultery:

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4).

The Apostle Paul, after writing of how he betrothed the Church to Christ, also wrote of the need for purity, and warns Christians against straying from devotion to Christ:

"But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3).

When Jesus paid the price to buy His Bride, she (the Church) is sanctified, meaning set apart from Him exclusively, and cleansed of all sins:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Just as the Jewish groom and bride drank from a cup to mark a new covenant, the cup of communion serves as the symbol of the covenant through which Christ has obtained the Church, His Bride:

"And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.'" (Luke 22:20). (See also 1 Corinthians 11:25-26).

After the marriage covenant was established, Jesus had to leave the bride's home and return to the Father's house and stay separated from His Bride for a long time. Several times in His parables, Jesus spoke of a master who had to go away for a lengthy time, but would come again one day. Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom preparing living accommodations for his bride in his father's house, Christ had to go back to His Father's house in heaven to prepare living accommodations for the church:

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2).

At the end of the period of separation, the groom would come again to take his bride to live with him, and Jesus promised that He too would do that:

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:3).

Just as the taking of the Jewish bride was accomplished by a procession of the groom and male escorts from the father's house to the bride's house (usually at night), so the taking of the Church-Bride will be accomplished by a procession of Christ and an angelic escort from heaven to the home of the Church. As a result of the bride, the Church, not knowing the exact time of Christ's coming for her, her groom's arrival will be preceded by a shout. This is seen in the parable of the Ten Virgins:

"But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom!'" (Matthew 25:6a).

Christ as the heavenly groom with His escorts also comes with a shout:
"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God..." (1 Thessalonians 4:16a).

The Church-Bride will return with Christ to His Father's house in heaven after she is taken from the earth to meet Him:

"...and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17).

The word "Rapture" comes from the Latin translation of the Greek word "harpazo" translated in English as "caught up." The Greek word "harpazo" (i.e. "caught up", or "Rapture") carries with it the idea of being seized with irresistible force. This power is so great, it happens in a "moment" of time.

"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." (1 Corinthians 15:52a).

The Greek word for moment there is "atomos" from which we get the word "atom," which to the Greeks was the smallest thing possible, so small it could not be further divided into anything smaller. So, the Rapture happens in an "atom" of time.

Upon arrival in heaven, Christ and the Church-Bride will find the souls of Old Testament saints (the wedding guests) assembled in heaven when they arrive. (This return to heaven after the Rapture meeting with Christ in the air rules out any possibility of the Rapture occurring Post-Tribulation, meaning, after the 7 year Tribulation is over.)

Parallel to the custom of the Jewish groom and bride entering in the bridal chamber after their arrival for a physical union, thereby consummating the marriage that was covenanted earlier, so Christ and the Church-Bride will experience spiritual union after their arrival in heaven, thereby consummating their relationship covenanted earlier.

In correspondence with the Jewish bride remaining hidden in the bridal chamber for 7 days after arrival at the groom's father's house, the Church-Bride will remain hidden for a period of 7 years after arrival in heaven while the Tribulation period, those seven years of Daniel's Seventieth "Week", transpire on earth. Even as the Jewish bride remains hidden in her chamber for 7 days (one week), so too the Church-Bride will remain hidden in heaven during the 7 years (also one "week").

Just as at the conclusion of the 7 days the Jewish groom would bring his bride out of the bridal chamber, now with her veil removed so that all could see who his bride was, so Christ will bring the Church-Bride out of heaven in His Second Coming at the conclusion of the 7-year Tribulation period in full view of all who are alive, so that all can see who the true Church-Bride is (Col. 3:4; Jude 14).

Ultimately, human marriage is a picture of the great love of Christ for His Church-Bride:
"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:31-32).

(material adapted from Dr Renold Showers at www.his-forever.com/jewish_weddings_rapture.htm, with additional material by this writer).

The angel showing the Apostle John all this tells him another of the seven blessings found in Revelation:

"Blessed are those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (vs. 9). When he tells John, "these are the true words of God," John is so overwhelmed that he falls to his face to worship the angel (a thing he attempts to do a second time in Rev. 22:8). The angel puts a stop to it instantly, saying, "Do not do that. Worship God."

The Apostle Paul warned us about people who would motivate us to worship angels, saying, "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels" (Colossians 2:18a). Let us, however, not be too hard on John. I imagine any of us today, if we were in John's shoes and seeing all the awe-inspiring things he saw, would likely be tempted to do the same. It is too easily in our human hearts to do this thing of worshipping angels. The Scripture informs us that the idols men worship have demons (fallen angels) behind them.

"What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons." (1 Corinthians 10:19-20).

We have already seen how Satan will successfully get mankind to worship him, a corrupt and fallen angel (Rev 13:4). How much more so might we be tempted to worship a pure and faithful angel? When the angel stopped John from worshipping him, he placed himself on the same level as John, saying, "I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus...for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." What is the testimony of Jesus? Jesus testified that He is the Son of God, and whoever believes in Him receives eternal life.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

"If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for the testimony of God is this, that He has testified concerning His Son. The one who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself; the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son. And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1 John 5:9-13).

John the Apostle had seen all these marvelous things in the prophecy being given him, and is told the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In all this prophecy John was receiving, the spirit, or heart of it, is that prophecy is all about Jesus.

In speaking of God's mysterious purpose for the ages and the Church, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"[God] made known to us the mystery of His will, according to the kind intention which He purposed in [Christ] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The spirit of prophecy is all about everything being "summed up" in Christ. In receiving this prophecy of the book of Revelation, John was utterly awestruck. The desire to worship, however, should not be directed toward the messenger bringing the prophecy, but toward the One whom the prophecy proclaims--Jesus! It is all about Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father!

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God." (Revelation 19:11-13).

Jesus first came to earth born in the most humble of circumstances in a little town called Bethlehem. He came meek and lowly to be a servant and fulfill His Father's will to save a desperately, hopelessly lost humanity. He humbled Himself, even to death on a cross, and rose from the dead the third day, alive forevermore! Though His first coming was humble, yet He shook the world. Hundreds of millions of men, women and children have bowed the knee to Him, calling Him Savior and Lord, and have followed Him. His enemy, Satan, the Devil, that old Serpent and Dragon, has resisted Him down throughout the ages since mankind came to be on the earth. We have seen in the book of Revelation how Satan successfully gathered hundreds of millions of lost humans to bow the knee to himself rather than to God.

Jesus promised that He would return. The moment of truth has arrived! Now, Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, is finally returning to confront a rebellious humanity. Jesus is named "faithful and true." Faithful means He can be counted on and can be trusted. True means that there is no lie in Him; what He promised, He will do. He says what He means, and means what He says. His coming again is going to be a terror to the rebels, for He is coming to wage war against them. His judgment about them, on both their actions and intentions, is righteous.

In the beginning of Revelation, we saw that Jesus is described as having eyes "like a flame of fire." He sees through all manner of trickery, smokescreens, subterfuge, deceit and lies, like the way a cutting torch would burn through spider cobwebs. Here at His Second Coming, He is again described as having eyes like "a flame of fire." He is coming to wage a righteous war on those who dwell on the earth, for He sees and knows what is truly in their hearts and that picture is ugly beyond words.

It says, "on His head are many diadems." A diadem is a crown of political authority. The description of "many diadems" shows Jesus has the right to rule over all the nations, and is coming to do exactly that. He will rule the world! He also has a name written on Him that only He knows. Some day, His people will find out about that name.

"He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God." As Jesus was the Lamb of God whose blood was shed for the sins of the entire world, even for those who would refuse Him (1 John 2:2), so now He is the one who will shed the blood of unrepentant men. His name is called the Word of God. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). All the Scriptures, being the written Word of God, ultimately point to Jesus Christ, the living Word of God. The Scriptures foretold His first coming, and they foretell His Second Coming.

After Jesus finished His ministry after the resurrection, He ascended into heaven as His disciples watched.

"And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come again in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.' Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away." (Acts 1:10-12).

The angels announced that as Jesus left the disciples from the Mount of Olives, so He would return to that same Mount of Olives. His return will indeed be at the Mount of Olives, as revealed in prophecy:

"Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in the middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!" (Zechariah 14:1-5).

If ever there was a passage to convince Jehovah's Witnesses and others who deny that Jesus is God, this verse should provide the proof that He is indeed God. The "LORD" (Yahweh/Jehovah) is God, and this prophecy says His feet will touch on the Mount of Olives. The angel told the disciples that Jesus would come back to the Mount of Olives. Face the facts. Do not deny, but believe!

We saw in Revelation 16:13-16 the armies of the world gathered together in the place called Armageddon. The devil's purpose for the overwhelming multitudes is to attack Jerusalem to make a final end of the people of Israel. But, ultimately, it is God who draws those multitudes there in order to judge them.

"And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty." (Revelation 19:14-15).

Following Jesus out of heaven are His armies "clothed in linen, white and clean," which signifies righteousness. As an interesting side note, a young believer who loved horses once asked me, "Are there animals in heaven?" I referred her to this passage of the armies riding on white horses, and gave my opinion that I don't think God is partial to only horses--He made all the animals and called them, along with everything else He made, "very good" (Genesis 1:31) So, in my opinion, there are at least animals in eternity on the New Earth, if not in heaven also, for I don't think eternal life would be complete without them.

From the mouth of Jesus comes a sharp sword, just as we first saw Him in Rev. 1:16. A sword symbolizes warfare and bloody death and we are told "so that with it He may strike down the nations." Jesus' coming rule of the world will be absolute. In Psalm 2 we are told concerning Jesus the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware." (Psalm 2:7-9). So it is in Revelation 19 that we are told, "He will rule them with a rod of iron" (vs. 15). Jesus will tread the wine press of God's wrath.

The prophet Joel spoke of the gathering of the world's armies as "multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14). Joel also said one verse earlier (vs. 13), "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great." We also saw that imagery in Revelation 14:

"So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles" (Rev. 14:19-20).

So when we see Jesus' robe dipped in blood (vs. 13), it signifies He is there to tread the wine press of the wrath of God, even to make the blood flow as deep as a horse's bridle. No matter how strong the armies of men, the vast, vast multitudes at Armageddon are doomed, for the Lord God who judges them is Almighty, and fierce is His wrath!

"And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.' Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, 'Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and the flesh of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.'" (Revelation 19:16-18).

Jesus Christ has a name, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." It is written on His robe, which is dipped in blood. It is by His rightful absolute authority that He wages war to overthrow the kings and lords of earth, and sheds their blood. It is also written on His thigh, the place where oaths

were made to absolutely verify a truth. When Abraham was going to send his servant out to find a bride for his son Isaac, he made the servant swear.

"Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he owned, 'Please place your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live; but you will go to my country and to my relatives, and take a wife for my son Isaac...so the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter.'" (Genesis 24:2-4,9).

Later on, when Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) was going to die, he placed his son Joseph under an oath the same way:

"When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, 'Please, if I have found favor on your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.' And he said, 'I will do as you have said.' He said, 'Swear to me.' So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed." (Genesis 47:29-31).

The name "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" written on the thigh of Jesus is a sign of truth secured by an unbreakable oath. Paul the Apostle wrote of God and Jesus Christ, saying:

"I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Jesus Christ, who testified the good confession before Pontus Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time--He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." (1 Timothy 6:13-15).

John next sees an angel standing in the sun. Again, because of the symbology, it is not literally in the globe of our Sun at a distance of about 93 million miles from Earth. Rather, as seen from earth's surface, the angel seems to have the sun directly behind it, shining in its strength, too gloriously bright to look at directly. This angel cries with a loud voice heard in all the earth everywhere for all the birds to come eat, for a terrifying slaughter is about to feed them. (Such a bloody feast is also called for in Ezekiel 39:17-20.)

"And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the throne and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh." (Revelation 19: 19-21).

The armies assembled at Armageddon will fight against Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). We also saw earlier, "These will wage war against the Lamb,

and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings" (Revelation 17:14a).

First of all God deals with two members of the "unholy trinity." The Beast (the Antichrist corresponding to Jesus Christ) and the False Prophet (corresponding to the Holy Spirit) are seized. These two are thrown directly into the Lake of Fire (about which we will learn more in Revelation chapter 20). Then God deals with the combined armies of mankind. There is no battle, no combative give-and-take. Rather, it is a summary execution! Jesus slays them with the sword from His mouth, which we first saw in Rev. 1:16, "and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword."

The Apostle Paul wrote prophetically of this moment:

"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8).

Just as Jesus spoke the creation itself into being (Genesis 1:1-31; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17), so He now destroys the armies just by speaking it:

"Now this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouth" (Zechariah 14:12).

The King James Version translates this plague as that their flesh, eyes and tongue will "consume away." The Hebrew for "rot" or "consume away" is "maqaq", which means to melt, or to flow, dwindle or vanish. When the Lord Jesus lets loose a plague on the armies, it happens so fast, that their flesh, eyes and tongues melt off their bodies while they are still standing up, meaning it is so quick that it is already finished before they can fall over. Judgment against them is swift, harsh and deadly.

Then it is over. His feet are on the Mount of Olives. Israel is saved.

Jesus has returned.

Chapter Twenty

Truths from the Year 3000

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time." (Revelation 20:1-3).

At this point in time, Satan, the angel who would be God, has been defeated. His two human partners in forming his "unholy trinity" have already been seized and cast alive into the Lake of Fire. His armies of the humans of the world have been slain. Now he faces Jesus Christ Himself returned and standing on the mount of Olives. An angel comes from heaven and puts prisoner chains on the vanquished fallen angel, and locks him up the abyss (which was opened in Rev. 9:1-11 to let out the demonic plague of locusts.) The great kingdom of heaven ruling on earth is about to begin, and Satan will not be allowed to continue to instigate rebellion and sin. This begins the time of the fulfillment of the "Our Father" prayer that Jesus taught His disciples: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

This passage curiously makes no mention of the demons over whom Satan rules. Since it hardly makes sense that they would be allowed to run loose to instigate rebellion and sin during the righteous kingdom anymore than their leader, it is certain their destiny is to be locked up in the abyss along with Satan. During His earthly ministry, Jesus confronted a man who was possessed by many demons, so many that when Jesus asked them, "What is your name?", they responded, "Legion." In the Roman army, a legion could have several thousand soldiers in it. The demons, as many as they were, knew who Jesus was, God Almighty, and in all their might and numbers, they were no match for Him! They were terrified of Him: "They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss." (Luke 8:31). When Satan is thrown into the abyss, it is certainly true all the demons are going to be sent there also.

"Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:4).

When the Lord Jesus' dramatic and climatic return occurs (which we saw earlier in Rev. 19:14), it says, "and the armies which are in heaven...were following Him on white horses." So, when the Scripture says, "I saw thrones, and they sat on them," the armies of heaven, meaning the Raptured Church, Christ's Bride (Rev 19:7-9), are the "they" who "sat on" the thrones, for it was promised to the Church, "He who overcomes and he who keeps My deeds to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father." It was also promised, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also

overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." Moreover, at the prophecy of the Rapture, the Church is promised, "and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17b). The text also tells us that those who had believed in Jesus during the Tribulation and were slain for their faith will come to life and reign too. The method of their execution was grisly, death by beheading. It is not unlikely the standard method will be by guillotine in great quantities around the world.

As an aside, the fact that believers in Jesus beheaded during the Tribulation rise from the dead at this point poses a very serious problem for the Post-Trib Rapture viewpoint. Why? Because we are told concerning the Rapture that "the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thes. 4:16b). If the Rapture occurs at the 2nd Coming, as per the post-Trib viewpoint, then why were these souls who had been beheaded "because of the testimony of Jesus" not raised from the dead at the Rapture? We are told very plainly concerning the Rapture that "we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51b). Note the word "all." ALL believers in Jesus will be raised at the Rapture. Since this is so, why were these "beheaded" believers in Jesus not also raised?

Someone might try to evade this point by saying, "Well, the Rapture happens then." No, it doesn't. When those souls who were beheaded during the Tribulation are finally raised, it is NOT the Rapture. Why? Because when the Rapture occurs, Jesus will be in the sky, and we will meet Him there:

"Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thes. 4:17a).

This mid-air meeting obviously does not happen when the beheaded believers are raised, for by the time of that raising from the dead, Jesus has already come down from heaven from the sky, and His foot has already landed on the Mount of Olives, and thrones have already been set up (i.e. thrones would not be getting set up on earth while Jesus is still descending from heaven in the skies, which is where the Rapture occurs.)

The plain fact is that the Post-Tribulation Rapture cannot be true. and as we are shortly about to demonstrate, neither are the Pre-Wrath Rapture and Mid-Trib Rapture. Only the Pre-Trib Rapture CAN be correct!

It is the Pre-Trib Raptured and glorified Church which sits on thrones after the Second Coming, for just as Jesus sits on His throne, so will His Bride sit at His side. Concerning the demons being sent to the abyss, the Scripture says Satan is bound and locked up therein. As we have already seen, the demons are not specified as also being seized at that same moment; yet we know they will also be sent there. This leads us to a question: if the demons are going to the abyss, why doesn't the Scripture show it occurring when Satan is seized and locked away?

Actually, the answer lies in this: judging the demons is a part of the Church's role in ruling beside Christ. Jesus dealt with the leading dark angel; the enthroned Bride deals with his dark followers. In a passage written by the Apostle Paul to counsel believers how to deal with disputes among believers (and to rebuke them for handling disputes badly), he says to them: "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is

judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?" (1 Corinthians 6:1-3).

The Church will judge the nations and she (the Church-Bride) will judge angels! It is here after the return to earth of Jesus the Lamb, when the thrones are set up, that the demons are judged and follow their master into the abyss. Divine Justice allows the redeemed humans, who were so sorely beset by demons with temptations to sin, to face those very same ones who so enticed them to evil, and to pass judgment on them and send them to their prison in the abyss. Once Satan and his demons have been dealt with, the focus of judgment shifts to the nations still surviving.

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' The righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and His angels, for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46).

At the end of the Tribulation Period, that 70th Week of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, Jesus will return. The human armies are slain, Satan is locked up, and his demons are judged and follow him into the abyss. Now the nations are gathered before the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are classified into sheep and goats. In the Bible, sheep are used as a symbol of God's redeemed people (Psalm 23:1-6; John 10:27-28). The goats here in Matthew 25 are representative of unredeemed people. At the end of the Tribulation period, there will be across the globe survivors who trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin (sheep), and there will also be those people who rejected His offer of redemption (goats).

When Jesus spoke of things done to (or not done to) "these brothers of Mine" (Matt. 25:40), He was speaking in a relational sense of His Jewish brethren (meaning fellow Israelites), for Jesus was in His humanity born a descendant of the tribe of Judah. In the context of the Tribulation period, "these brothers of mine" are the 144,000 sons of Israel, and indeed all the Israelites --

man, woman and child -- who came to saving faith in Jesus as their Messiah. We saw in Revelation 12 that after the mighty war of Michael the archangel and the angels of heaven with the demonic forces of darkness, Satan in his defeat was cast to the earth and in his fury rushed off to destroy whatever Jews he could kill. Persons having faith in Jesus during those seven years will minister to the needs of those believing children of Israel. In contrast, those who worshipped the Antichrist (each of them wearing proudly the 666 Mark) will NOT minister to their needs. So, at the judgment of the nations, a person's faith (or lack thereof) would be revealed in how they treated the 144,000, or indeed, any believer in Jesus during those seven years. Jesus said that you shall know a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:15-20).

So then, Jesus, with His Bride at His side, along with the raised-to-life Tribulation believers, judges the nations. The "sheep" mortals surviving the 70th Week are welcomed into the kingdom, for they are righteous by their faith in Jesus. In his epistle, James wrote, "faith without works is dead." (James 2:20b). The "sheep" were believers who showed their faith by their works, as James also wrote (James 2:18). In contrast, the "goat" mortals are unrighteous people (unbelievers) who showed their lack of faith by their lack of works; these get thrown into Hell, for no unbeliever enters that blessed 1,000 year kingdom of God about to break forth on the earth. Let us look at why this is true.

Jesus gave a parable of a sower as relates to the kingdom of heaven:

"Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" And he said to them, "An enemy has done this!" The slaves said to him, "Do you want us then, to go and gather them up?" But he said, "No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"" (Matthew 13:24-30).

Later His disciples asked Him to explain the parable:

"And He said, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.'" (Matt. 13:37-43).

We see that when Jesus comes in the 2nd Coming, He will send His angels to gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and all who commit lawlessness. This means that every soul that by the end of the Tribulation has not trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior will not be allowed to enter the Millennium (i.e. 1000 years kingdom) when Jesus rules the world. The wheat being gathered

into the barn is those believing souls being gathered into the Millennial Kingdom where Christ will rule in righteousness. In the context of the Tribulation period, Scripture warns, "Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" (Psalm 2:12).

Those unbelievers on the earth when He returns will not have done homage to Jesus. No, they rather did homage to Satan and his Antichrist, as we saw earlier in Revelation: "All who dwell on the earth will worship [the Antichrist], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (Revelation 13:8).

No unbeliever (i.e. the unrighteous) will enter the kingdom where Jesus will rule. None. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

In the parable of the sower, we saw that the angels will gather "all" the unrighteous -- not a single one will be exempt. During the reign of terror of the Antichrist, ALL unbelievers will receive the infamous 666 Mark:

"And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead." (Revelation 13:16).

In addition, they all have that "loathsome and malignant sore" from the first Bowl of God's wrath:

"So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant ore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image" (Revelation 16:2). Since we already have seen ALL unbelievers will worship the Antichrist (Rev 13:8), this means they will ALL have the loathsome sore.

When the thrones are set up at Christ's 2nd Coming, the unrighteous "goats" or "tares" will ALL have the 666 Mark and the sores. They chose to worship Antichrist and reject the true Christ, Jesus. There is no entry to the coming kingdom for those who do not know God:

"For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power." (2 Thes. 1:6-9).

All "goats"/"tares" (i.e. those who did not trust Christ) will not enter the Millennium, but will be thrown into Hell to await Judgment Day. Jesus spoke of the days before His return to earth as like unto the days of Noah. All believers were saved; all unbelievers were destroyed:

"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man; they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage,.

until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:26-27).

God's sole provision of safety in Noah's day was the ark. Inside was the only escape from certain death. No one outside God's provision survived. During the time of the Exodus, when the Angel of Death was going to smite all the firstborn of Egypt, the only provision of safety was to be inside a house whose mantle and doorposts were struck with Lamb's blood (foreshadowing the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, 1 Cor 5:7-8), such that the Destroyer passed over that house. In the days of the Tribulation and God's kingdom, the only provision of safety is faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb that was slain (1 Peter 1:18-21; Revelation 5:6-9). In Christ, judgment has already passed over; therefore in Christ we survive God's judgments, and find eternal life in a new resurrected body. Outside of Christ, there is no hope of survival (John 3:18,36; 14:6). When Christ sits on His throne in God's kingdom for 1,000 years, His reign will be only righteousness. No unbeliever can--or will--enter. None.

"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:5-6).

The rest of the dead, in context, are the unrighteous who are being reserved for Judgment Day and the Lake of Fire, which is the second death. When the Scripture calls this resurrection the "first," it does not mean the first one to occur in time, but rather, the first of two categories or types. The two types of resurrection are shown in the Old Testament:
"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2).

When considering resurrection in terms of time, Jesus' resurrection was the first as the Apostle Paul wrote, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep ... But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming." (1 Corinthians 15:20,23).

Clearly, when the Bible is considered as a whole, the resurrection of Jesus is the first resurrection in time, followed in time by the Rapture, and then again in time followed by the raising of the Tribulation saints who died for their faith. All of these are the "first" resurrection in the sense of being members of the first of two categories. The "second" category is the one to which Daniel referred, the one to "disgrace and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2b). This second is a resurrection of the lost souls who will be raised in order to be judged and condemned to the second death.

We are told "blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection." This is the fifth of seven passages in Revelation giving a blessing (Rev. 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). A promise is made that they will be priests of God and Christ, and will reign with him. The role of a priest was to take the offerings, cares and concerns of the people and present them to God. As priests, those in the first resurrection will intercede on behalf of the mortal human beings (the "sheep" or "wheat") who will enter the Millennial Kingdom. But, those in the first

resurrection will also reign over the sheep. The reign they bring will be totally good, wise and just, and the subjects being ruled will flourish and prosper under it.

Now, as an aside, let us consider one way in which these in the first resurrection will reign: the restoration of the earth. The physical earth will be a ruined planet. There will be vast areas contaminated with radioactivity from nuclear war. The oceans and springs of water will have been turned to blood. Trees and grass are burned up and much wildlife is dead. Devastation beyond our imagination will have destroyed the cities. The mountains and islands are wiped out.

As the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Creator, could merely speak a word, and all of that would be instantly remedied. Yet, there is the fact that the Bride will reign alongside Jesus. Revelation is silent about how the ruined planet will be made habitable again. It may well be that those in the first resurrection, under the authority of Jesus, will have a part in restoring the earth, not instantaneously, but over a short period of time, after the 2nd Coming but before the Millennium. An obscure prophecy in Daniel hints at such a delay following the 2nd Coming..

"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination is set up, there will be 1,290 days. How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days!" (Daniel 12:11-12).

When specifying a range, such as in a before-and-after comparison, it is proper to say "from" this, "to" that. The Daniel prophecy above has the first element, a "from" starting point, which is the abomination of desolation (Daniel 9:27; 12:11), but it curiously is lacking the second element, a "to" point. In other words, "from" the abomination of desolation, "to" ... This begs the question of what the 1,290 and 1,335 days are counting up "to." We have already seen that there is exactly 1,260 days "from" the abomination of desolation "to" the Second Coming. The 1,290 days goes 30 days past the return of Christ, and the second figure, the 1,335 days, goes an additional 45 days past that (75 days total past the Second Coming).

May I propose that the those first extra 30 days past the 2nd Coming are used by Christ and the Bride sitting on the thrones to judge the demons and the nations? Then the additional 45 days are for repairs to planet Earth to make it, not merely habitable again, but perhaps make it even as beautiful as the original Garden of Eden in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom. The blessing for those who wait to the 1,335 days ($30 + 45 = 75$ days after the 2nd Coming) is that they will enter the Millennial Kingdom itself.

Why would God take 30 days, and then another 45 days, when He could do it in the snap of the fingers? We might ask why He took six days to create the universe and rested on the seventh. The answer is that He could have created the world in a mere moment (He has the ability because He is omnipotent), but instead He was working out a purpose of His will that pleased Him (Rev. 4:4). Likewise, though Jesus as our Creator could remake the ruined earth in a blink of the eye, He instead is also working out a purpose that pleases the Father, specifically, to get His Bride to enter into, and be a part of, His reign over the earth. The Bride will be part of His restoration of the earth.

**"When the thousand years were completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore."
(Revelation 20:7-8).**

This verse is for the far future, our future. Sometime after the year 3000, a being of unspeakable evil will come forth from a centuries-old imprisonment, being let loose to wreak havoc among the peoples of earth. This terrible entity will not act violently himself to slay, but will craftily incite the sons and daughters of men to wanton evil, rebellion and warfare. A fearsome multitude will follow him, screaming for blood!

Some plot for the latest horror novel? Some demented dream of slasher movie fans? No! Rather, solid biblical truth. As already noted, Satan gets let go after being locked up for 1,000 years, and gathers from among humanity an immense army. What happens next? Let's look at Scripture.

**"And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."
(Revelation 20:9-10).**

This passage reveals much. First, it reveals that this is the devil's last stand. After his release, he gathers a vast army of humanity to make war against God's people ("the camp of the saints") and against Jesus Himself reigning in Jerusalem ("and the beloved city"). Scripture does not record that a single saint's life is lost, or that a single blow by the maddened, enraged and rebellious army is struck. The unholy army moves into position and they are suddenly and summarily slain by fire coming down out of heaven.

What a scene! In the Old Testament, men came to seize Elijah the Tishbite, God's prophet:

"Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, 'Man of God, the king says, "Come down."' Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.' Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty." (2 Kings 1:9-10).

A second attempt was made in verses 11-12, with the same results. Finally, a third captain of fifty came up, and begged for his life (verses 13-15), which was granted him.

We see this miracle again during the Tribulation period as the Two Witnesses, doing the miracles and bearing the testimony of Moses and Elijah (representing the Law and the Prophets), are also supernaturally protected by fire.

"And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way." (Revelation 11:5).

Now, at the end of the Millennium, somewhere after the year 3000, a vast multitude whose number "is like the sand of the seashore" (Rev. 20:8b), is likewise slain. An awesome, terrible sight that must be, to see a veritable deluge of fire killing each and every one of those rebels, no matter that their number "is like the sand of the seashore."

So, even as we saw that this "last hurrah" of Satan ends with his eternal imprisonment to the Lake of Fire, there is another truth to be gleaned from this event somewhere after the year 3000. What is this truth we can glean? How about proof that the Rapture is Pre-Trib?

Set your sanctified imagination to work. Sometime here, in our day (as of the time of the writing of this work), there is going to be a future seven-year Tribulation period, that last week of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 Weeks (Daniel 9:24-27). This time will fall upon all who live upon the earth. Move ahead to the ending of those 7 years to where the prophesied return of Jesus Christ happens. The skies open, and Jesus Christ returns:

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and true, and in righteousness He judges and wages war." (Revelation 19:11).

In verses 12-21, Jesus destroys the rebel enemies Satan gathered at Armageddon.

Now, there are many views of when the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:17) will occur in relation to this 7-year Tribulation period ("Trib" for short). Some believe it will occur after the 7-years; hence it is called the Post (i.e. after)-Trib Rapture. According to this view, Christ's Church will have to endure through the entire 7-year Trib period, and only at its finale, as Jesus parts the skies in His 2nd Coming, will the Rapture occur.

Then there is a more recent view that emerged in the 1990s called the Pre-Wrath Rapture. According to this view, Christians will be enduring through the first half of the Trib period, and then sometime after the middle but before the end of the Trib period, the Rapture will occur. The name is derived from its proponents' view that the wrath of God does not begin until sometime after the middle of the 7-year Trib period.

Next we have the Mid-Trib Rapture. Its proponents believe that since the Scripture pivotally divides the Trib period into two equal halves of 3-1/2 years each (which as we have seen already, it does), then this middle point has significance, and therefore this "Mid" point is when the Rapture occurs.

Finally, there is the Pre-Trib Rapture. This view teaches that Christians will not endure any of the 7-year Trib period. Hence, it is called the Pre (i.e. before)-Trib Rapture.

Now, what do the deaths of the rebels (after the release of Satan from his 1,000 years imprisonment) have to do with knowing when the Rapture will happen in relation to the 7-year Trib period? I'm glad you asked.

There are some other points that need to be expressed to bring clarity to the answer. First, when the Rapture occurs (1 Cor. 15:51), the dead in Christ are resurrected into glorious immortal bodies like Jesus' own after He resurrected. Then the living are resurrected also.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself."
(Philippians 3:20-21).

An important thing to note about a resurrected body, in addition to being immortal, is that marriage and conceiving/bearing children is a thing of the past, and does not occur anymore to a resurrected person.

In Matthew 22, the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection (Matthew 22:23), tried to trap Jesus by posing a hypothetical situation where 7 brothers, each in turn as the predecessor died, married the same woman. They thought they had Jesus because of the idea, "in the resurrection, therefore whose wife of the seven will she be? For they had all married her."
(Matthew 22:28).

Jesus revealed a truth about the resurrection in response:

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven." (Matthew 22:30).

This truth means that resurrected people no longer are married and therefore no longer have children. This will have bearing on determining when the Rapture occurs, as we shall see shortly.

The second point that needs to be expressed is that there is a cut-off point beyond which no one gets saved, but rather people receive only wrath, and as we have seen earlier, that cut-off point is the time the Antichrist performs the Abomination of Desolation.

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate..." (Daniel 9:27a).

"Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the Holy place..." (Matthew 24:15a).

"... and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God..." (2 Thessalonians. 2:3b-4).

What happens when the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation, is that a judgment is placed on those who have believed his lie of blasphemy. In short, God seals them in their unbelief.

"that is, the one whose coming [i.e. Antichrist's] is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth as to be saved." (2 Thessalonians. 2:9-10).

We then read in the following verse that God seals their doom:

"For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." (2 Thessalonians. 2:11-12).

From the above, we come to the right conclusion that if a person who is going through the Tribulation period does not believe the gospel by the time of the middle point when the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation, then because that person "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved" and "did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness", God will seal them in their unbelief by sending "upon them a deluding influence ... in order that they may all may be judged."

In other words, no one gets saved after the middle of the Tribulation period. If you have resisted the outpouring of the gospel by the 144,000 and the Two Witnesses during the first 3-1/2 years of the Tribulation period, then you will be sealed in unbelief and are doomed to damnation in the Lake of Fire.

The above was mentioned to a dear Christian woman many years ago. Her reaction was shock and indignation. She told me, "My God is a God of love--He would never do that!" It is a fine sentiment, but sentimentality is not a proper definition of Biblical truth. There is, in fact, a precedent in Scripture for God sealing someone in their unbelief: Pharaoh of Egypt in the days of Moses. God commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh to tell him to "let My people go." However, He told Moses that Pharaoh would not, and that God was going to harden his heart. When you look at the Scriptures, you find that at first Pharaoh hardened his heart, and then God hardened it for him.

Pharaoh hardening his own heart: Exodus 7:13; 8:15; 8:32; 9:34

God hardening Pharaoh's heart: Exodus 9:12; 10:27

We also see that God gives men and women over to their sins in the New Testament:

"Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them." (Romans 1:24).

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions..." (Romans 1:26).

"And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind..." (Romans 1:28).

Now when you speak of the 7-year Tribulation period, those verses in Romans are even more applicable. The whole world has rejected God as they worship the Antichrist, the beast, and through him, worship the devil, Satan, the dragon.

"they worshipped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast..." (Revelation 13:4a).

Corroboration that there is a cut-off point, beyond which no one gets saved in the Tribulation, is found in Revelation 14 (which we looked at earlier in this study).

"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The imagery is that of Jesus completing the harvest of souls. This passage describes the completion of that harvest, "the earth was reaped." This is past tense, meaning the deed is done, and over with, finished. In human farming, once the harvest is finished, there's no more. It's over. While this passage in Revelation doesn't say WHEN it will happen (in the context of the Tribulation period), it does tell us THAT it will happen. This passage demonstrates that there is a cut-off point in the Tribulation when the harvest of saved human souls is reaped, and after which there is no more harvest.

Let's continue with the passage.

"then another angel came out of the temple, which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle." (Revelation 14:17)

First, we see Jesus completing the harvest of souls unto salvation with a sickle. Now, we see another sickle. However, as we are about to see, this sickle is not for salvation, but judgment.

"Then another angel ... called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, 'Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, to the horses' bridles..." (Rev. 14:17-20a).

From this we see that once the harvest of the souls by Jesus is done, there is no more salvation, but only the terrible wrath of God. While Revelation 14 demonstrates that there is cut-off point after which no one gets saved, and also shows that only wrath follows that cut-off point, it is 2 Thessalonians 2 that shows WHEN the cut-off point occurs--at the Abomination of Desolation at the middle of the Tribulation's seven years. (Daniel 9:27).

We have already seen in Revelation 11 that the Two Witnesses minister for a specific and limited time period, 1,260 days, and that their ministry period is in the first half of the Trib period, starting on Day 1 of the 7 years. A question ought to arise in connection with the length of the time given to them to minister: why is it only 1,260 days? Why not the whole 7-years of the Tribulation period? Many Christians believe that people are saved throughout the entire 7-year

period, so why is the Two Witnesses' ministry only for half that time? We have already seen that they are supernaturally protected so no one can harm them.

"And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way." (Revelation 11:5).

Antichrist is empowered by Satan (2 Thes. 2:9-10), but the Two Witnesses are protected by God. Satan's Antichrist, no matter how empowered, is no match for God, for "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4b). Satan's power could not defend the Antichrist from being slain by that fire from the mouth of the Two Witnesses.

The only thing that makes sense for the Antichrist to be able to kill them is because God allows him to do that. But if, as many Christians believe, the gospel is shared and people get saved throughout the entire 7-year Tribulation period, why allow the ministers to be killed when the job is half done?

This makes no sense unless we realize that there is a cut-off point for the gospel, as per Rev. 14:14-20, and that the cut-off point is when the Antichrist commits the Abomination of Desolation. It is then, at that point in time in the middle of the 7-years, when God allows His Two Witnesses to be slain, and then seals men in their unbelief (2 Thes. 2:11-12).

What we must realize is that God doesn't allow the Two Witnesses to die when the job is half done, because at that point, it is ALL done. The earth is reaped, the harvest gathered in, the offer of salvation withdrawn, and the inhabitants of the earth who have rejected Christ get only vengeance from that middle point (starting with the Abomination of Desolation) until the end.

Now, returning to our year 3000 situation described earlier, let's tie it all together to show why the Rapture MUST be Pre-Trib. Let's start by examining the human race after the year 3000. By that time, the 7-year Tribulation (i.e. aka Daniel's Seventieth Week) has come and gone. The 1,000 years of the Millennium have also come and gone. At this point in history (at the far future from our current day), there are four categories or states of human existence.

1. Saved and Immortal (i.e. resurrected).
2. Saved and Mortal (i.e. still living, not dead yet).
3. Lost and Dead (i.e. died in their sins without Christ).
4. Lost and Mortal (i.e. still living, but without Christ).

By process of elimination, let's examine who the people are that join Satan in this one last frightening rebellion, where their number "is like the sand of the seashore." (Revelation 20:8b).

They do not belong to Category #1, Saved and Immortal.

Why? Simply put, people in the rebellion are mortal, meaning they are living, but can die. In point of fact, they do die, being slain by fire out of heaven. Moreover, the people in Category #1, as immortal resurrected people, would NEVER follow Satan, because in the resurrection it says, "and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:17b). As we have already seen, those in the rebellion follow Satan, not Jesus Christ.

They do not belong to Category #2, Saved and Mortal.

Why? The people in the rebellion are attacking the people of Category #2: "they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints." (Rev. 20:9).

They do not belong to Category #3, Lost and Dead.

Why? The people in Category #3 are already dead in Hell, awaiting the final judgment. The people who join Satan in this last rebellion are still living people, who are later slain by the fire out of heaven.

By the process of elimination, we have showed that the people who join Satan's rebellion are not Category 1, 2 or 3, so the only option left is that they are Category #4, Lost and Mortal. They are lost because they follow Satan against God, and mortal because they are slain by fire out of heaven.

Let's examine the various Rapture positions by comparing them to this rebellious army. The rebels were gathered by Satan from among "the nations which are in the four corners of the earth" (Rev. 20:8b). They were living mortal people from all across the earth from out of all nations on earth.

Now, living mortal human parents have babies, not resurrected people who are "like angels in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). Therefore, the people who are mortals coming OUT of the Millennium, must have had mortal parents going INTO the Millennium, of whom they are the descendants. Here is where the various Rapture viewpoints stand or fall, meaning, they are vindicated or they fail.

Let us start with the Post-Tribulation Rapture position. This teaches that Christians enter into and have to survive going through the entire seven years of the Tribulation period, having to endure the terrible slaughter the Antichrist commits against Christians. In the Post-Trib view, not only do Christians enter the Trib period, but other souls during that seven years also hear the gospel and get saved. If this is the case, then there is a problem concerning those mortal lost people who join Satan in his final rebellion--a serious problem. In order to understand what the problem is, let's remember that when the Rapture occurs, all believers in Jesus are taken, and this occurs in two stages.

Stage 1: As Scripture says, "the dead in Christ rise first" (1 Thes 4:16b). Every believer in Jesus Christ who died, from the days of the Apostles until the day Jesus returns in the 2nd Coming, is resurrected.

Stage 2: Then, every living mortal who believes in Jesus Christ is also caught up and resurrected, without having to pass through death first, but go directly from mortal to immortal (1 Thes. 4:17a; 1 Cor. 15:53).

All believers, both among those who sleep (i.e. died) and those who are still living, are resurrected at the Rapture--no believer in Jesus Christ is excluded, even as Scripture says,

"Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." (1 Cor 15:51). Note the word "all."

Now, since every mortal human being who is a believer is resurrected at the 2nd Coming, there are NO believing mortals left. The only mortals remaining on earth are unbelievers. As we saw earlier this chapter, no unbeliever enters the Millennium kingdom. Every one of them, without exception, bears the 666 Mark or has otherwise worshipped the Antichrist (again, notice the word "all" in both passages below):

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain." (Rev. 13:8)

"And he causes all, the small; and the great and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six." (Rev. 13:17-18).

Since there are no mortal believers (all believers in Jesus, both living and dead, are resurrected), and since no unbeliever enters the 1,000 year kingdom of God, then where do the mortals come from, whose descendants join Satan at his final rebellion? The mortal unbelievers are all slain, not entering the Millennium, and all mortal believers have been resurrected, and therefore no longer have babies, so whose children are they who come out of the Millennium to join Satan? If the Post-Trib Rapture were true, then once Jesus executes judgment on those with the 666 Mark at His 2nd Coming, there are literally NO mortal human beings left on the planet to enter the Millennium, get married, and have babies.

But, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, which we examined earlier, indicates there ARE mortal human beings who enter the Millennium. Some of those mortals are believers ("sheep") and some are unbelievers ("goats"). But if the Post-Trib Rapture is true, there can be no "sheep", for they would have ALL been resurrected in the Rapture and changed into immortals.

This also brings up the other problem (which we saw earlier) with the Post-Trib Rapture. We just said above that "since every living mortal who believes in Jesus Christ is also caught up and resurrected, there are NO mortals left who are believers." The same applies to those who "sleep" (meaning, they died believing in Christ.) With the Post-Trib Rapture, just as there would be no mortal believers left, it is equally true that there would be no "sleeping" (i.e. dead) believers still remaining in their graves either. If the Rapture had indeed happened at the 2nd Coming, there would be NO people still in the ground who can be raised to life, for the Rapture would have already emptied their graves. Just as Matthew 25's parable of the Sheep and the Goats shows there will be mortal believers left, so Revelation 20:4 shows there will be "sleeping" believers left as well after the Second Coming. Neither of these conditions could be true if the Rapture had happened at the 2nd Coming.

There are only three possible explanations for these twin discrepancies:

#1 Some believers (both among the living and the dead) are not taken in the Post-Trib Rapture.

#2 Some people get saved at the Second Coming when they see Jesus, AFTER He has returned.
#3 There is NO Post-Trib Rapture.

Explanation #1 is not the case, for Scripture says, "we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed." (1 Cor 15:51b). The important word is "all." It is clear that no one who is a believer, whether "sleeping" or alive, will be "left behind."

Explanation #2 is not the case, for as we have already seen, the harvest of souls is completed by the time of the end of the ministry of the Two Witnesses, and no one gets saved after the Abomination of Desolation, for God seals men in their unbelief (2 Thes. 2:11-12). After the middle of Trib period, there is no longer salvation, but only wrath. Anyone who has not trusted in Christ BEFORE the middle point, does not get a "second chance" after that time. Moreover, even if we allowed that some people got saved after the 2nd Coming, that still doesn't explain the deficiency of why those who believed in Jesus and were subsequently slain for their faith during the Trib period, were still in the ground to be raised at Rev. 20:4, having "missed" the Rapture, which would have emptied the graves of ALL who trusted in Christ.

Therefore, only Explanation #3 can be correct. The Post-Tribulation Rapture fails, for it does not stand the test of Scripture. The Post-Trib Rapture is not true.

Now, let us turn the focus of examination to the Pre-Wrath Rapture. The same problem of the identity of those mortals who join Satan in his final rebellion exists for the Pre-Wrath Rapture. The Pre-Wrath position says that Christians enter the Tribulation period, go through the entire first half, and suffer the murderous rampage of the Antichrist after the Abomination of Desolation, and then when that slaughter is accomplished sometime during the second half, then God unleashes His wrath in retaliation, so according to the Pre-Wrath position that is when the Rapture occurs. Even the proponents of the Pre-Wrath position themselves teach that no one gets saved after the Rapture, for it is all wrath from that point and beyond.

But, since we know and have demonstrated from Scripture that no unbeliever enters the Millennium kingdom, the Pre-Wrath Rapture runs into exactly the same problem as the Post-Trib Rapture. There are neither any mortal believers (for all believers have become immortals who do not have babies), nor any mortal unbelievers, for NO ONE wearing 666 on their forehead or right hand, or who worshipped the Antichrist and has the loathsome and malignant sore from the 1st Bowl judgment, will be allowed to enter the righteous kingdom of God under the reign of Jesus. So, where do the mortals who join Satan in his last stand come from? A Pre-Wrath Rapture does not allow for any mortal believers, the only kind of mortals who would be allowed into the Millennium.

So then, it also fails the test of Rev 20:4. If the Pre-Wrath Rapture were true, then why didn't the Rapture empty the graves of those who had believed in Christ and died during the 7-years Trib period? Why were there still bodies to be raised in Rev 20:4 AFTER the 2nd Coming? The Rapture would have left NONE of them behind. It can't be because some believers were killed after the Rapture, such that their bodies are those to be raised in Rev 20:4. Why? There wouldn't be ANY believers on earth unless either some believers were "left behind" (violates "all" being

in the Rapture) or else if other people got saved after the Rapture (violates no salvation after the Abomination of Desolation). Neither of those conditions are possible.

As with the Post-Trib Rapture, the simple truth is that the Pre-Wrath Rapture is not true, for it violates the Scripture, and therefore fails the test of Scripture. The Pre-Wrath Rapture is wrong and untrue.

Now let us examine the Mid-Trib Rapture, which states that Christians enter the 7-years Tribulation, going fully through the first half, and then at the middle, get Raptured. This runs into the same problem as the Post-Trib Rapture and Pre-Wrath Rapture positions. If the Rapture happens at the middle point of the Tribulation, and we already know that no one gets saved after that point, then again, there are no mortal believers left anywhere on the planet to enter the Millennium and have babies. No, the only mortal human beings left alive are unbelievers, and they are all bearing the 666 Mark and have the loathsome sores, and have worshipped the Antichrist, so they are destroyed at the 2nd Coming, not being allowed to enter the kingdom of God. So, where do the mortals come from? All believers are immortals, therefore not having babies, and all unbelievers are slain and gone.

As with the previous two positions, the Mid-Trib Rapture has two major discrepancies that nullify it. Moreover, as we mentioned earlier in this study, there is a third problem inherent in the Mid-Trib position. We have seen that after the Abomination of Desolation, Antichrist makes war on those who believe in the true God and Jesus His Son. If the Rapture happened at the middle point, then all believers would have been removed off the earth to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thes 4:17b). Against whom, then, would Antichrist make war? The believers are physically removed from the earth, so they are literally beyond his reach, and they are also immortal, so he couldn't kill them even if he could reach them. And, there are no additional believers after the Mid-Trib Rapture, since no one gets saved after the Abomination of Desolation, so again, who are the believers against whom he makes war? In the Mid-Trib Rapture position, there are NONE left on earth.

Like the two previous positions, the Mid-Trib Rapture does not stand under the scrutiny of Scripture, but fails the test. The Mid-Trib Rapture is not true.

By the process of elimination, this leaves only the Pre-Trib Rapture position, in which no believer goes through ANY of the 7-years Tribulation, but are Raptured before it. It does NOT fail the test of those two discrepancies that disproved the Post-Trib, Pre-Wrath and Mid-Trib positions.

When the Pre-Trib Rapture happens, the gospel goes forth during the first half of the seven years. Although all believers were taken from the earth, both the living and the dead, a NEW generation of believers (consisting of both Jew and Gentile) springs up because they believe the preaching of the gospel by the Two Witnesses (to Israel) and the 144,000 (to the Gentile nations). It is these new believers against whom the Antichrist goes forth to make war after the Abomination of Desolation, and whom we see in the fifth Seal (Rev. 6:9) as the martyrs under the altar, and then later we see as those redeemed people standing before the throne of God with palm branches (Rev. 7:9). It is these new believers who were slain whose bodies are resurrected in Rev. 20:4.

The absence of the Church due to Pre-Trib Rapture also agrees with the Jewish style, flavor and nature of Revelation at chapter 4 and beyond, wherein Israel gets center-stage, those events being the fulfillment of the seventieth Week of Daniel 9:27. The absence of the church due to the Pre-Trib Rapture also agrees with why those sharing the gospel are all Jewish (i.e. the Two Witnesses and the 144,000). The Pre-Trib Rapture also agrees with the fact that the use of the word "church" vanishes after the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, meaning, the Church Age is over, and therefore the Church is removed via Rapture to enter into heaven to meet her beloved Bridegroom, Jesus, according to the Jewish wedding customs, and there be spiritually married to Jesus.

The Pre-Trib Rapture stands under the scrutiny of Scripture, and is vindicated. It is true and correct.

Now, after the fire comes down out of heaven to slay all the mortal humans who joined with Satan in his final rebellion, that devil, Satan himself, is "thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." People have tried to say damnation is not forever, but it is annihilation, meaning, existence ceases. But, the Antichrist and False Prophet, who were cast into that doom 1,000 years previously before the devil, are still there. If the Lake of Fire were annihilation, then those two men would no longer be there, for they would no longer exist. The fact that the Scripture says they ARE there (present tense), shows that damnation is NOT annihilation. As it is, 1,000 years later, they are still being continually tormented there. They, the two members of the "unholy trinity," are joined by their master, Satan, the last member of that "unholy trinity," who begins his own eternity of endless torment. forever and ever.

So much for the angel who would be God!

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:11-15).

The most somber and sober moment in mankind's history now happens: Judgment Day. We see "a great white throne and Him who sat upon it." The Person sitting there is Jesus Christ, for He said, "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son." (John 5:22).

We see Jesus in the fullness of His deity, for it says, "from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them." His is the absolute Presence of God Almighty. Before Him stand the dead to be judged. Who are these dead? Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he

who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." (John 5:24).

Jesus also said of Himself, "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18).

In Revelation we are told, "He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death" (Revelation 2:11b).

And, the Apostle John wrote, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5).

Based on the above passages, we conclude the dead assembled before Jesus on the great white throne are the lost dead of all time. Skipping ahead, we see that "death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them," and "the sea gave up the dead which were in it." And, we have just seen that heaven and earth have fled away. All the lost dead are brought up to be judged, but no person who trusted in God through Jesus (including Old Testament saints who were ultimately redeemed by Christ's sacrifice on the cross) will be judged at this scene. God's judgment and wrath already fell on Jesus at the cross, and no one who fled to Jesus will ever be lost or face this Judgment Day scene.

The lost dead, however, do not have the blood of Jesus as their protection and shield. While they lived, they would not come to Him as their Savior, so now they will face Him as their Judge. That the books are opened tells us that God keeps a record of our lives. Every sin, whether by thought, word or deed, will be brought up as evidence against the lost dead. Their sinfulness will be totally revealed, and their guilt inescapably proven.

There is one other book present, a special book, the Book of Life (Ps. 69:28; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). It is likely that the guilty ones will find every avenue of escape blocked, and being desperate to avoid eternal damnation, they will plead as a last resort for a search for their name in the Book of Life. Jesus graciously allows the request, for the Scripture says, "if anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire." None at that Judgment Day has their name found written in the Book of Life, and every last one is thrown into the Lake of Fire to be tormented for all eternity.

When the last lost soul has been dealt with, sin is forever finished! Never again will anyone, anywhere, sin. From here on, there will be only everlasting righteousness!

Reader, Judgment Day is a reality that is surely coming; though it seems to delay, it is inevitable and inescapable. The final Lake of Fire is true and real. If you do not know for certain that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, get the matter settled right away! If you are reading this, there is still time.

1) Be honest with God: "Lord, I have sinned against You, by thought, word and deed. I am guilty."

2) Turn to God through faith in Jesus: "Lord, I believe in Jesus, that He died on the cross to pay for all my sins so I can be totally pardoned. I receive Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for saving me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen."

If you place your trust in Jesus now, He will keep you from the Lake of Fire later; you will never face Him on that terrible Great White Throne on Judgment Day.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

Chapter Twenty-One

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea." (Rev 21:1).

Last chapter, we saw Jesus Christ revealed in His full Deity, the One from whose presence heaven and earth fled away. Jesus is, and has always been, God Almighty, one with the Father Almighty and the Holy Spirit Almighty, three Persons revealed in one God. Yet, when He came to earth at Bethlehem, He became man as well, being both 100% God and 100% man. As the God-man, He gave His life for the sins of mankind. He needed to be both God and man in one Person in order to rescue the souls of men. As God, He could overcome death, but He could not die; as man, He could die, but He could not overcome death. At the cross, He died as a man; at the resurrection, He overcame death as God.

With sins paid for, He charged His disciples to spread the good news (i.e. the gospel) that sins had been paid for, so men could be forgiven. In the events of the Tribulation, the Millennium and the Great White Throne, all things pertaining to sin and death were finally accomplished. Concerning redemption, the Apostle Paul wrote, saying, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Cor. 5:17).

God's purposes were not to reform the old nature, but to press on to a new nature. He accomplished that goal in the salvation of mankind through faith in Jesus Christ. Now it is time for creation to "catch up" with the new creature that God has made of those who have believed in His Christ.

In Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Now, in Revelation 21:1, we find, "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away." Peter wrote of the passing away of the first:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up ... Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to His promise we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:10, 12-13).

The new creation "wherein righteousness dwells" is pure and utterly free of any contamination of sin. The long night of sin and darkness is finally over. The Day has finally dawned and arrived.

Some have argued in so many words that this "new earth" is really the same old earth, but cleaned up. But, notice the Scriptures, which said of the old earth and heaven which "fled away", that "no place was found for them." They could not be located; this means, they no longer had existence. Again, we see in Rev 21:1 that the old creation "passed away," which means also that it ceased to exist. Peter's description of an intensely hot burning that destroys the old creation of God looks as if God had let all the energy stored up in all the atoms in all the universe, suddenly be released in one all-consuming nuclear explosion. (That will be quite a sight to see from our

glorified bodies!) The Scriptures state strongly that "the elements will be destroyed with intense heat." (2 Peter 3:10b). As still further evidence that the new earth is not just the old one refinished, note the surface of earth, as we know it, is about three-fourths covered in water, whereas the new earth has no sea at all.

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.' And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, 'Write, for these words are faithful and true.'" (Revelation 21:2-5).

There is a new city, New Jerusalem, that now makes its appearance. We discussed earlier (in connection to the Rapture) the Jewish Wedding Custom. After engagement, the young man goes back to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride. Using that marriage custom to teach, Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3).

The New Jerusalem is the fulfillment of His promise "to prepare a place for you." It is a place of beauty beyond imagination, just as beautiful as a bride "adorned for her husband" glows in the eyes of her husband as he looks upon her in pure love. A loud voice from God's throne calls out, "The tabernacle," or dwelling place, "of God is among men." The voice continues proclaiming, "and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."

Mankind will finally behold God directly, and be filled with awe and joy, and bask in His love, and fully love Him back. It will be the "best of the best," a thing our hearts have hungered for, and we shall be satisfied and content. Scripture has said, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9 KJV).

With the new heaven and new earth, man is just beginning to see those things God has prepared. We see a new heavens and new earth, and now the incredible and marvelous New Jerusalem. It all just keeps getting better and better! Now, God Himself, the infinite, almighty Creator, will dwell directly among His people. It will be joy elevated to the nth degree! God promises He will personally "wipe away every tear from their eyes." If there be anything that causes tears, God Himself will comfort and cheer, and Himself wipe away those tears; He further promises that there will no longer be any death.

In teaching the resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote, saying, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54b-55). Death is gone, done and over! For every person who has ever stood at a grave side, heart breaking and tears flowing over a spouse, child, or other loved one, this is the end of all that forever! God

moreover promises, "there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain." All the believers of all ages will be members of that glad and glorious day. Death will separate us no more! Injury, sickness and death, all of that is forever behind!

God promises from the throne, speaking as absolute sovereign of all creation, "Behold, I am making all things new." Not only does He promise an end to things that bring mourning, crying or pain, but He creates a new universe to ensure that promise comes true! How great is God almighty, how loving and kind! How awesome are His deeds, how infinite His knowledge and understanding!

Then He secures the promise with a declaration, saying, "These words are faithful and true." Faithful means what He promises, He will do. True means there is no shadow of turning, no loopholes, no trickery. The promise means exactly what it says. A popular saying is this: "If it is worth saying, it is worth saying in writing." John is instructed to write the words, for God secures it "in writing," so that there is no misunderstanding.

"Then he said to me, 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.'"
(Revelation 21:6-7).

With the words, "It is done," the promised future of blessing is no longer pending--it has arrived! God's eternal nature is emphasized next, "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." Why? To comfort and assure us who live in the present time. Not only has God promised these wonderful things of blessing, not only has the time for them arrived, but the guarantee of their continuance, the very hope and assurance that they will never come to an end, are established as well, for the promises are rooted and grounded in God's very nature. "Alpha" is the first letter in the Greek alphabet, and "Omega" is the last letter in Greek. Beginnings and endings are all wrapped up in God's eternal nature. For so long as God exists, these promises will hold true. Since He exists forever and ever, so will these promises be fulfilled forever and ever! Faithful and true is God Almighty!

Everyone who has ever lived has known thirst. God promises "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost." God is all about life. We have seen the Book of Life (Rev. 20:15) and the Crown of Life (Rev. 2:10). Now we see the promise of the Water of Life. To draw near to God is to embrace life. To reject Him is to reject life. Because all mankind has sinned (Romans 3:23), man had to die, both physically (as gravesides will attest), and spiritually (Ephesians 2:1). If man dies rejecting God, he then suffers the Second Death in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15).

God does not want anyone to perish! (John 3:16). God pleaded with Israel to submit to His judgment that they had to go into captivity in Babylon for their sins (Jeremiah 27:12-13). He declares to us today, "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather that he should turn from his ways and live?'" (Ezekiel 18:23). "'For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the Lord God, 'Therefore, repent and live.'" (Ezekiel 18:32).

Friend, if you don't yet believe in the Savior, the same question God asked Israel applies to you: "For why will you die?" Why will you turn your back on the only One who can give you life? That same One says, "he that overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son."

The Apostle John wrote, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5). The one who places his faith in Jesus Christ "will inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son." While the text says "he" and "son," every girl and woman is equally precious, loved and beautiful in His sight.

"But the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8).

Though the text is speaking of events in our far future, the words are being given to us today to warn us that the blessings do not apply to those who are "cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars." The list contains a wide spectrum of sinfulness. The one that is perhaps surprising in its emphasis is "all liars." In today's world, the sin that is perhaps thought the least offensive, is what we call a "little white lie." Perhaps it was in Divine Foreknowledge of this attempt to downplay the seriousness of lying, that the Holy Spirit chose to tell concerning "all liars" that "their part will be in the lake [of fire]." There is no such thing as a "little white lie." In fact, THAT description is a lie!

All liars will go to the Lake of Fire, as will the cowardly (won't trust in Jesus because of fear of what others will say); unbelieving (for whom it is not that they CAN NOT believe, but that they WILL NOT believe); abominable (homosexuals, lesbians, transgenders, etc.); murderers (not only those who slay, but also those who hate their brother in their heart, as per 1 John 3:15); immoral persons (those who cheat on their spouse, sleep with someone to whom they are not married, or are prostitutes and pornstars, or who use pornography, or just lust for someone in their heart); sorcerers (those who deal in Wicca, the occult, Satanists, New Age, etc., and those who do "recreational" drugs like heroin, cocaine, meth, etc.); and idolaters (those who bow themselves before false gods, Muslims, Hindus, Roman Catholicism's version of Mary and the saints, and also those who practice greed and worship money, as per Colossians 3:5).

Perhaps you are reading this and your heart is sinking because you see yourself in the list above, and know you are guilty. Fear not! God offers to you a thorough cleansing of all that! Go to the cross of Jesus, where thereupon He shed His blood to pay for your sins--ALL of them--so you can be forgiven. When you trust in Jesus Christ, and Him alone (no trust in yourself or anything you can do), then He saves you and washes you clean of all your sins.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31).

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

When we trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our identity changes. All we were prior to Christ has passed away, for He gives us a new identity.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come." (2 Cor. 5:17).

If you saw yourself in that list of kinds of people who won't enter heaven, then trust Christ and become a new person! Paul the Apostle wrote of that transformation, saying, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, now swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

There it is again, that list of people who won't make it into heaven. But, as a matter of identity, that all changes when we trust Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. Watch as Paul continues, saying, "Such were some of you; but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11).

A believer in Jesus Christ has a new identity: child of God. The old identity, fornicator, thief, immoral person, drug-abuser, drunkard, murderer, gay, lesbian, etc., no longer applies in the sight of God. He has cleansed us of all our sins, and continues to cleanse us day by day as Jesus who lives forever intercedes on our behalf.

"Therefore He is able also to save forever, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25).

No one need be numbered among those who will be cast into the Lake of Fire, which burns with fire and brimstone forever and ever!

"Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundation stones of the city wall

were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." (Revelation 21:9-21).

John is told, "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Then John is shown a city. At this point, a really puzzling question can easily arise in our minds: The Lamb's wife is . . . a "city?" What is he talking about? How can someone be married to a city? Finding the answer is helped by remembering that Jesus spoke of the Church in the human terms of a Jewish wedding custom. He told us, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3).

At the present time of this writing, the Rapture has not yet happened. The Church is still on earth in the engagement stage of the wedding custom. Jesus is, according to the custom, preparing a place for His Bride to dwell; the New Jerusalem will be that very place. Then, as per the wedding custom, when the Father gives the signal, His Son comes forth in the Rapture and fetches His Bride. He then is reunited with her, and heads back to His Father's house for the wedding (which we saw earlier in Rev. 19:9).

There will undoubtedly be millions beyond counting of souls in the Church who together constitute the Bride. A rather LARGE dwelling place will be needed to house so many millions of people. It will take an entire city to house so many. So, when the angel shows John the place where every resurrected Church person dwells, John is seeing the entire Church together in that city. Since Revelation is a book of signs and symbols, it is understood that the angel is using symbolic language in calling the dwelling place of Christ's glorified Church, "the wife of the Lamb." In seeing the city, John is seeing the Church.

The city New Jerusalem is gloriously beautiful, "having the glory of God." Its brilliance is like crystal clear jasper. There is a wall surrounding it, seventy-two yards (144 cubits) high, made of jasper. There are twelve gates, three on each of the four sides of the square. These gates are each made of a single huge pearl, so, yes, there ARE pearly gates! The gates are named to honor the twelve tribes of Israel; the foundations are made of twelve precious stones, and are adorned with every precious stone, being named to honor the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. The city itself is made of pure gold like pure glass, including the streets.

Once many years ago, I was driving my car east toward the heart of the city, and a skyscraper building was directly ahead of me at some distance yet. The setting sun was behind me, and the rays of the sun caught the building just right. The whole building lit up with a reflection that shone awesomely like pure gold! It lasted less than a minute, but the sight took my breath away, and I could scarcely take my eyes from it, so beautiful and glorious was it! I can only imagine how beautiful the New Jerusalem will be, beautiful beyond words as only God could make it.

Let us compute the size of the New Jerusalem. The length in Greek is the "stadium" ("stadia" for plural). Some translators say the 12,000 stadia are 1,500 miles, others 1,400 miles. Let's go with the lesser.

The description says the length, width and height are equal. There are generally two geometric figures that match that description, a cube and a pyramid, which has exactly a third the volume of a cube. Let's go with a pyramid.

It's size, then, is 1,400 miles x 1,400 miles x 1,400 miles x $\frac{1}{3}$, which equals 1,372,000,000 cubic miles. A cubic mile is a volume that is 1 miles long by 1 miles wide by 1 miles high. We figured in a one-third in the calculation, because a pyramid is a third the size of a cube.

Now, let's try to put that into perspective. A 2-1/2 room apartment could have a volume of about 30,000 cubic feet. Jesus said, "In My Father's house are many dwelling places." So, with a figure to work with, let's assume my dwelling place is a mansion 33 times larger than that 2-1/2 bedroom apartment, such that the mansion has 82-1/2 rooms, which for our purposes is about 1,000,000 cubic feet. A cubic foot is a volume that measures 1 foot x 1 foot x 1 foot.

If a 82-1/2 room mansion can be thought of as having 1,000,000 cubic feet of living space, how many such mansions could fit into the New Jerusalem? Well, we have to convert cubic miles into cubic feet. One cubic mile has 5,280 feet x 5,280 feet x 5,280 feet, meaning, there are 147,197,952,000 cubic feet in each cubic mile. Now, when you multiply that many cubic feet times the cubic miles in the New Jerusalem as a pyramid, you get about (take a breath here, folks!):

135,310,245,000,000,000,000 cu-ft. That is, 135 quintillion, 310 quadrillion, 245 trillion cubic feet.

Since each 82-1/2 room mansion occupies 1,000,000 cubic feet, we divide the above figure by 1,000,000 for each mansion, giving us 135,310,245,000,000 mansions.

That's 135 TRILLION, 310 BILLION, 245 MILLION mansions in the New Jerusalem.

That's some serious real estate.

Even if every person who ever lived, including all the saved and the lost (say about 100 billion) were able to enter into the New Jerusalem to live there, each with his or her own 82-1/2 room mansion, it would be mostly unoccupied, with only 0.05% being used for all those mansions and 99.5% being unused space.

For comparison, let's look at a really large mansion on earth, the Biltmore Estate near Asheville, North Carolina. It is America's largest privately owned home consisting of 250 rooms and 175,000 square feet, having:

- 65 fireplaces
- 35 bedrooms
- 43 bathrooms

16 chimneys
250 acres of landscaped gardens.

Now, as impressive as the Biltmore estate is, I strongly suspect God's idea of a mansion is much bigger than my example of 1,000,000 cubic feet containing 82-1/2 rooms. Say each mansion in the New Jerusalem was 1,000 times larger, such that it has 82,500 rooms, over 300 times larger than the Biltmore Estate. Even then, the New Jerusalem would still be about 50% unoccupied space. This is assuming the New Jerusalem is a pyramid, not a cube, which would triple the available space.

How great is God, and how unsearchable His ways! When Jesus said, "in My father's house there are many dwelling places," He was not exaggerating! Many dwelling places, indeed.

"I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abominations and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21:22-27).

There are no streetlights, no dark alleys, no places for crime to fester, for God's glory shines throughout the city, and Jesus the Lamb of God is its lamp. This was also prophesied in the Old Testament, saying concerning Jerusalem, "No longer will you have the sun for light by day, nor for brightness will the moon give you light; but you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory." (Isaiah 60:19).

The peoples of the world will have that light to walk by, and all the riches of the kings of the earth will flow to the New Jerusalem. In prophecy where the old Jerusalem is compared to the new, Scripture says, "And they will call you the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Where you have been forsaken and hated with no one passing through, I will make you an everlasting pride, a joy from generation to generation. You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob." (Isaiah 60:14b-16).

The promise that Jerusalem's "gates will never be closed" is also echoed in the same Isaiah prophecy, saying, "Your gates will be open continually; they will not be closed day or night, so that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession." (Isaiah 60:11).

We find concerning the New Jerusalem the promise "nothing unclean and no one who practices abominations and lying shall ever come into it." This is not to say there will be people who do such things at that far future time; rather, it is a warning to us living on the earth today that we can have no part of this city because of our sins. Therefore, we must trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. Then, and only then, can any of us be numbered among

"those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" and enter into, and walk on the streets of gold, of that glorious city that will last forever.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1-2).

We have seen the Tree of life (Rev. 2:7), the Crown of Life (Rev. 2:10), the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5). Now we see the Water of Life, and the fulfillment of the promise of access to the Tree of Life. Both the Water and the Tree are also found in an Old Testament prophecy in Ezekiel chapter 47. Verses 1 to 11 speak of the Water of Life. The Tree of Life is described in parallel to Revelation's description:

"By the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing." (Ezekiel 47:12).

The Tree of Life was first introduced to us in Genesis in the Garden of Eden, where it says, "Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Genesis 2:9).

When Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were banned and barred from the Garden because of the Tree of Life:

"The the LORD God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever. Therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So he drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden he stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.'" (Genesis 3:22-24).

Now, here in the new heavens and new earth, that long exile is finally ended. God had always meant for men to eat of that Tree of Life, for that was why He planted it in the garden. If Adam and Eve had not listened to the serpent of old, Satan, by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which God had forbidden, but instead had eaten from the Tree of Life, then the entire history of the entire universe as we know it would have been blessedly different.

Once they had made that sinful choice, it was not spite on God's part that they could not eat of the Tree of Life, but actually love acting in mercy. Reader, think about it. Would you really want to live forever in a fallen, aging body corrupted by sin, forever getting older and older, diseased and feeble, and never able to escape it? That would be a Hell of its own.

God had in mind, not the extension of miserable life in sin-cursed bodies, but resurrection into new eternal bodies. While mankind did lose access to the Tree of Life in the beginning, our

access to it will finally be restored! And, this time, there is no Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil to trip us up again.

"There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night, and they will have no need of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:3-5).

When Adam and Eve sinned, God laid a curse on mankind. On women He commanded pain in childbirth:

"To the woman He said, 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'" (Genesis 3:16).

Then God cursed the land for men:

"Then to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat from it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'" (Genesis 3:17-19).

The moment God laid the curse on the ground because of Adam's sin, much more was affected than just the fields that Adam's hands and feet touched. The curse fell upon the entire universe! All of creation was affected with this sense of frustration and futility, of man's doing work and getting interference and bad results despite his best efforts. The Apostle Paul wrote of this futility:

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:20-21).

Man's sin caused the corruption of the entire universe. Scientists call this slow but steady corrupted decline of the universe the Second Law of Thermodynamics, also known as the Law of Increasing Entropy. Entropy means everything is breaking down, from complex to simple, and from order to disorder. Scientists envision a time when the entire universe will run out of energy, calling it the "heat death" of the universe. Simply put, the entire universe is dying.

Humorists have aptly called the stubborn refusal of the world to cooperate with man (i.e. the curse), "Murphy's Law," which states, "If anything can go wrong, it will." In the new heavens and new earth, there will no longer be any curse. "Murphy's Law" will finally be repealed.

Concerning the New Jerusalem, we are told "the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it." This is marvelous beyond words! Prior to the city's arrival, God's throne has been in heaven. Now, it is transferred to this incredible city! God's bond-servants will serve Him in perpetual delight. Saved mankind on the new earth will enter the city, and with their own eyes, will see God's face. Previously, God had told Moses in response to a request to see God's glory, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20). Now, men will be able to see His face--and live. God's name will be on their foreheads, a sign of being God's purchased possession, purchased from captivity to sin by the blood of the Lamb into the glorious freedom of being the children of God.

In the New Jerusalem, there will no longer be any night nor any street lamp nor any need for the light of the sun. We found this promise in chapter 21 and find it again here. No more night, nor darkness, but only blessed light, the light of both God the Father and Jesus the Son. God's bond-servants will reign forever.

"And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true'; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place. 'And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.' I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.'" (Revelation 22:6-9)

Remembering that these words were written in the first century, we are assured once more that, though many centuries have passed since the words were penned, the words will surely happen. God's words are faithful, for He is faithful; God's words are true, for He is true. The spirits of the prophet were able to tell the future because they were empowered by God, the One who truly knows the future. We are told, not that these words could take place, but rather that they must take place.

Jesus reassures us of His coming, 'I am coming quickly.' For us in the twenty-first century, time is running out. The Rapture and the Tribulation and the 2nd Coming will soon be upon us. Though it has been a couple thousand years since Jesus was here, as men reckon time, yet that time is but a blink of the eyes to the One who dwells eternally, for "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day" (2 Peter 3:8b).

In the prayer of Moses we read, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust and say, 'Return, O children of men.' For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night." (Psalm 90:1-4).

The psalmist wrote, "Of old You founded the earth and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Even they will perish, but You endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing

You will change them and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not come to an end." (Psalm 102:25-27).

We mentioned earlier that scientists envision the "heat death" of the universe, when the entire universe runs out of energy. Here in the Psalms, we find that truth then of old, "the heavens...will wear out like a garment." Yet we won't have to wait untold eons of time to see the end of the old dying universe, but only another 1,007+ years (the 7-years Tribulation and the Millennium, plus whatever little time remains between now and when these things begin to happen), in order to see the end of the old universe, and the beginning of a new eternal one.

In Revelation chapter one, we were told, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev. 1:3). Now at the end of the book of Revelation, we are again told, "Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book" (vs. 7). Like matching bookends, these warnings emphasize what we must do: read and heed!

Poor John! He is so overwhelmed, that he falls a second time to worship at the feet of the angel (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Again, the angel does not allow this, but corrects him with the wise words, "Do not do that! ... Worship God." He explains--again--that he is a fellow servant of God, just as is John and as are the prophets and all those who "read and heed." Again, let us not be too hard on our dearly loved brother in Christ, who is now home with the Lord. If you or I were to be drawn in vision to see and hear what John saw and heard, we'd be on our face before the angel too.

On the other hand, through the agency of the words John obediently penned, we who live today are in fact seeing and hearing essentially what John saw and heard. We ought to be stirred as never before to bow to and worship God who made us for His good pleasure, and sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, that we would be redeemed from our sins. Jesus, the Messiah, paid the purchase price for us to be set free from slavery, and not only that, but to strike our chains to stand amazed in liberty, and not only that, but to adopt us to become children in His family, and not only that, but to make us princes and princesses in His kingdom to reign alongside Him forever and ever!

Reader, is your pride worth missing out all the "good stuff" eternity holds? If you have already placed your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then your place in all these wonders is already secured. If you aren't sure if you've received that forgiveness (or know that you have, in fact, been pushing God away), NOW is the time to get your chains broken off so you too can stand a free man, a free woman.

As the hymn "Jesus Paid It All" says:
Jesus paid it all.
All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain.
He washed it white as snow.

"And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.'" (Revelation 22:10-11).

The angel tells John, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy." This is in stark contrast to the angel speaking to Daniel the prophet, saying, "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase" (Daniel 12:4).

The book of Revelation is given to us, not to conceal, but to reveal, "for the time is near." Daniel's prophecy had to wait centuries, because "knowledge will increase." Someone has said that 90% of all the scientists that have ever lived, are alive today. There has been an explosion of knowledge in our time. We need go no further than the Internet. Information on virtually every conceivable topic is available at a moment's notice. Almost the vast sum total of all human knowledge is available from almost anywhere in the world! More information is added in a single day, than could be heard, watched and read by you or me in a single human lifetime. In response to questions people have asked me, I have many a time said with a smile, "You can find anything on the Internet."

Knowledge has increased. Therefore, according to Daniel's prophecy, we are near "the end of time." The angels' words to John say, "for the time is near." Watching the patterns of events in the world as they align with prophesied events, we too can say, "It is near, even at the door."

Now the angel says to John something that seems troubling. Twice he says to let evil doers still do their evil, and twice he says to let the righteous still do their righteousness. Certainly, we can agree that righteous people ought to continue doing good deeds, but let evil people continue in evil? Why would he say that? After all, isn't God in the business of saving, or redeeming sinners from their sins, of rescuing people from going to Hell?

The word "let" is the Greek "katecho", which means "to hold down, or to hold fast, or retain. After all God has revealed in this last book of the Bible about sin, redemption and eternity, if a person who does not know Christ as Savior still does not believe, then God effectively washes His hands of such unbelief.

We saw earlier that no one gets saved after the middle of the 7-years, starting at the moment the Antichrist goes into the temple of God and declares himself to be God, thereby committing the Abomination of Desolation. We saw how the Apostle Paul wrote that, the moment that happens, God sends a strong delusion to seal unbelievers to their fate of judgment.

God's offer of forgiveness by faith is not forever! The door will close one day on that offer, and judgment will pour down. If you, reader, by the time you die, still do not believe after all you have "seen and heard" (through John's penned words), then God says, "So be it." If you miss the Rapture, and continue in disbelief through the first 3-1/2 years of the Trib until the Antichrist makes his obscene boast in the temple of God, then you are doomed. So be it. However, if you

reader, are among those who believe, then continue to practice your righteousness and continue to live a holy life.

Whichever category, reader, that you are in, please "read and heed." If you are not yet a believer, know that on the day of your death, the door of opportunity to trust Jesus for the payment for your sins certainly shuts forever, and there is only judgment awaiting you. Your waking nightmare will truly begin, and will be yours forever and ever. Remember, too, that your death might be today--tomorrow is guaranteed to no one.

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.' The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Revelation 22:12-17).

Jesus again tells us He is coming quickly, and He intends to reward (Greek "misthos", pay for service, wages, hire) every man "according to what he has done." For believers, that reward is an evaluation of how they have served Him after they trusted Him for salvation. Paul wrote to believers, saying, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Greek word for "seat" is "bema", meaning a tribunal or rostrum. In the days of the apostles, there were competition events not unlike our modern Olympics. Even as our judges evaluate the athletic performances, and those who did best receive a gold, silver or bronze medal, the competitors in Paul's day strove to receive a "perishable wreath," which is a victor's crown of public honor.

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

In another passage, Paul wrote of a believer's evaluation.

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built

on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

When Jesus comes, His reward is with Him. He will test each believer's work to reveal what manner of quality it is. If the believer did righteous acts and lived a holy life, then outcome of his life will be revealed as gold, silver and precious stones. However, if the believer lived selfishly, not exercising self-control in all things, then his deeds will be revealed as bad (Greek "kakos", intrinsically worthless), meaning wood, hay and straw. The fire of Jesus' evaluation will burn them up.

This is that "bema" judgment for determining how well believers "competed" in this life. It is exclusively for believers for determining a reward for a life lived for Jesus. Unbelievers do NOT come into this judgment, but instead face the terror of the Great White Throne judgment, where their sinful deeds will be revealed and they will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Two different judgments, two different fires. In the "bema," only the person's deeds face a momentary fire, for Scripture says the believing person himself "will be saved." In the Great White Throne, the unbeliever himself faces eternal fire, and he perishes.

Jesus goes on to say He is:

The Alpha and the Omega
The first and the last
The beginning and the end.

Persons who deny Jesus is God ought to compare these descriptions of Jesus with Scripture:

"'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' say the Lord God, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" (Rev. 1:8).

"Thus says the LORD, the king of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts. 'I am the first and the last, and there is no God besides Me.'" (Isaiah 44:6).

Jesus Christ IS God!

"The last of the seven blessings given in Revelation follows, saying, "Blessed are those who wash their robes." It speaks of being cleansed of sin by trusting in Jesus' blood shed for their sin. Those who do so trust will have the right to the wonderful Tree of Life, and can enter the New Jerusalem. No sinful person can or will ever enter the city. Since at that far future time there will no longer be any sinning people (for they will all be in the Lake of Fire), this is a call for us who live today to realize we have a choice. Continue to do wrong and still be filthy, thereby forfeiting those joys and blessings and delights, or receive a full pardon and cleansing through Jesus as your Savior and Lord, now, today, and join the ranks of the righteous.

Jesus Himself testifies through His angel by the Apostle John so the churches will know all these things. He declares He is both the root (as the Creator) and the descendant (as the man born of David's lineage). Jesus is 100% God and 100% man, the God-man. He further declares Himself to be the "bright morning star."

In the letter to the church in Thyatira, Jesus promises, "He who overcomes...I will give him the morning star." The final and true treasure of life is not in things, but in loving relationships. Jesus promises His own self to the churches. When Jesus prayed to the Father, He said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3).

Ultimately, the joy of heaven is not in a place, but in a Person, our God!

The call goes out to everyone to receive eternal life and enter into a wonderful relationship with God that is as dear as friendship, as close as family, and as intimate as marriage. The Holy Spirit and the Church, the Bride of Christ, say, "Come!" The Holy Spirit is calling each of us, tugging at our hearts. The Church, Christ's Bride, is calling, sharing the gospel so people can be saved. Those who "read and heed" are calling to each one of us. If our hearts are thirsty, we can come to God through faith in His Son. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b).

To the descendants of Israel living today, this call comes to each of you as well:

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost." (Isaiah 55:1). Jesus the Messiah is calling you, O sons of Abraham, O daughters of Sarah!

"Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:6-7).

As C. S. Lewis would say, Jesus the Savior is calling you, O sons of Adam, O daughters of Eve!

"For He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2).

"I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book; if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming quickly.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen." (Revelation 22:18-21).

As the book of Revelation closes out, a warning is given. People driven by evil desires may try to tamper with the book of Revelation, especially people living on the earth once the Tribulation starts after the Rapture. People are warned neither to add to, nor subtract from, this book of Revelation. Do not cut verses out, nor add new ones. It stands as it is.

For the last time in Revelation, Jesus says, "I am coming quickly." Paul wrote to believers, saying, "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for

now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." (Romans 13:11-12).

John responds to Jesus, saying fervently, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." That should be the true cry of our hearts as well. Early Christians greeted each other with "Maranatha," which means "Our Lord has come." It reminded them that Jesus has already come the first time, and will come again.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all of you, dear readers!

Amen, and Maranatha!